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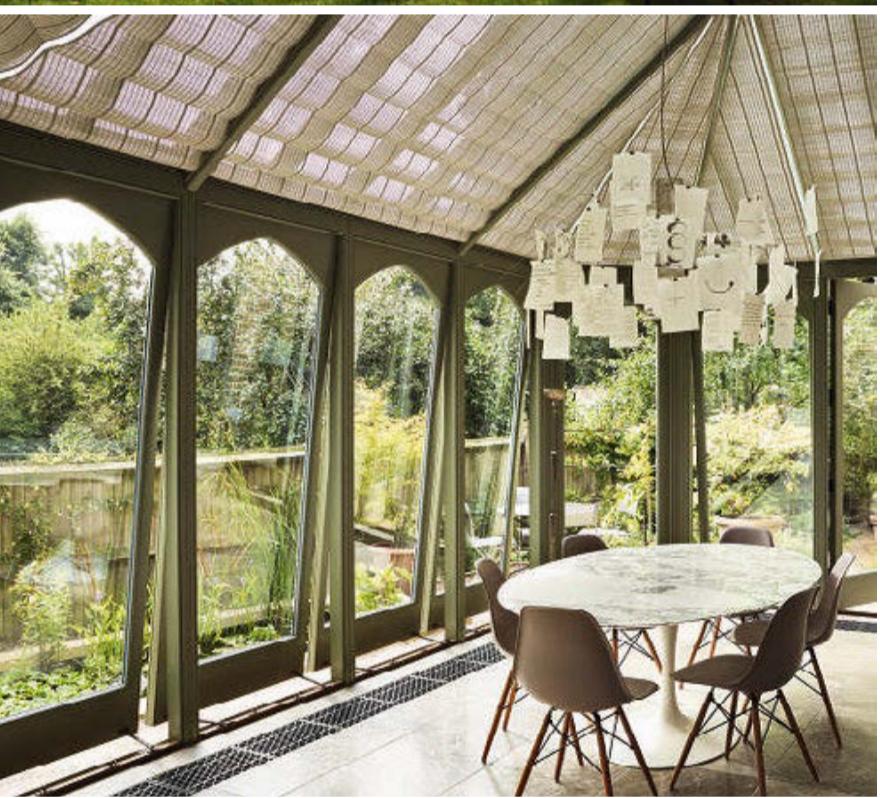
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A SUBSCRIPTION TO CL THIS MONTH

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Cover photograph

by Rachel Whiting.

Styling by Alaina Binks. Assisted by Ben Kendrick

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FIRST WORDS FROM THE EDITOR



Winter is the perfect time...

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WHITING. WING CHAIR, £1,098, THE COUNTRY LIVING COLLECTION EXCLUSIVELY AVAILABLE AT DFS

...to hunker down and catch up on some of life's simple pleasures. It's also ideal for making bigger plans – if you've thought about turning your hobby into a business, don't miss our new series (page 78) and apply now to take part in our FREE Pop-up Market at the CL Spring Fair in London (page 83). This is a special year for *Country Living* – it's our 30th birthday! We've been busy putting ideas into place, including opportunities to meet the CL team at a champagne breakfast and a celebratory afternoon tea at the Country Living Spring Fair in March, plus a reader evening in the gardens of Loseley House in Surrey on Midsummer's Day. We are also seeking mothers with daughters aged 30 who both enjoy reading *Country Living*. Contact us at country.living@hearst.co.uk with some pictures of you together and tell us why you love CL. You could win a great prize and be featured in the magazine. PS If you like the beautiful illustrations by Angela Harding for *Reading the Landscape* (page 34), tea towels featuring her prints (below right) can be bought in our Country Living General Store: shop.countryliving.co.uk.

Suey Smith



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emporium

Offset bold decorative designs with pale, weathered wood to give your home a fresh, contemporary feel



Light dark corners with this extendable copper lamp, £240, Baileys

of five), Anna Wilson-Patterson



Otter mug in fine bone china by Mark Greco for the Wildlife Trusts, £5.50, Creative Tops



Cotton Stellar cushion by Angie Lewin, £38, St Jude's



Big Mucker handmade bleached timber and metal shelves, £295, Loaf



Hand-painted Blue Flying Bird plate by Katy Leigh, £24, Unique & Unity



Set of four coasters in a Blackbird design by Linen Prints, £12, Country Living General Store



Wood and wire coffee table/shelving on wheels, £290, Ecora



Wrap up warm in this striped knitted alpaca scarf, £55, Plum of London



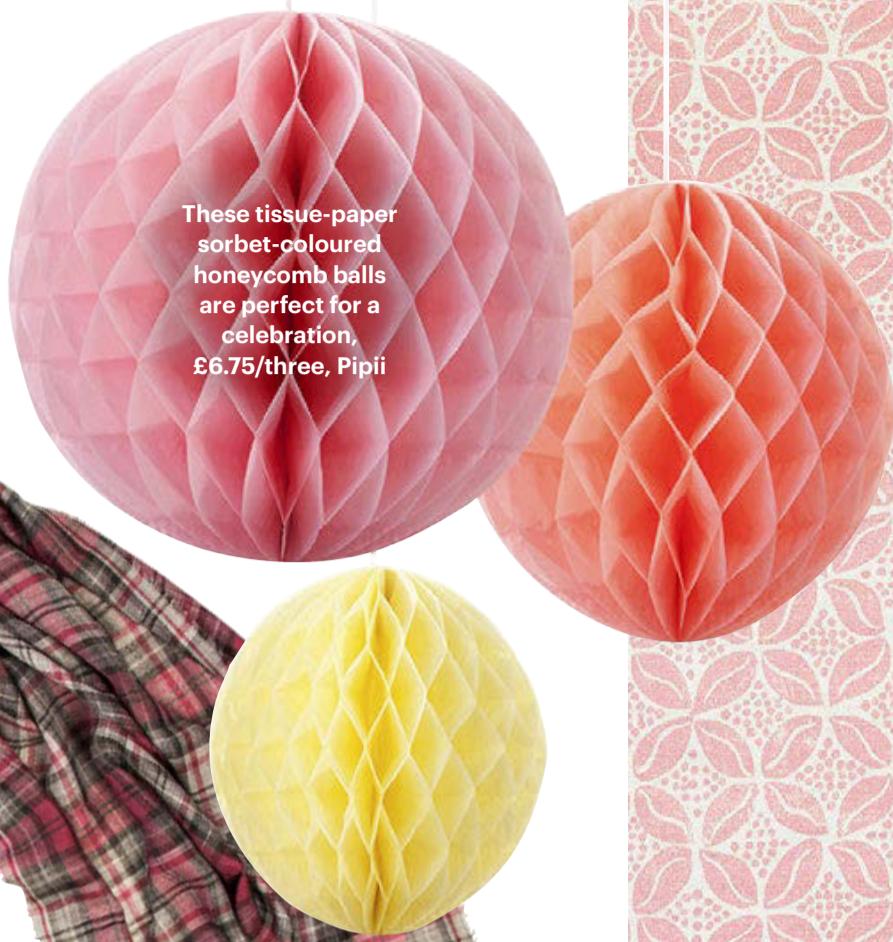
Lampshade in Bloom cotton, from £69, Woven Oak

EMPORIUM

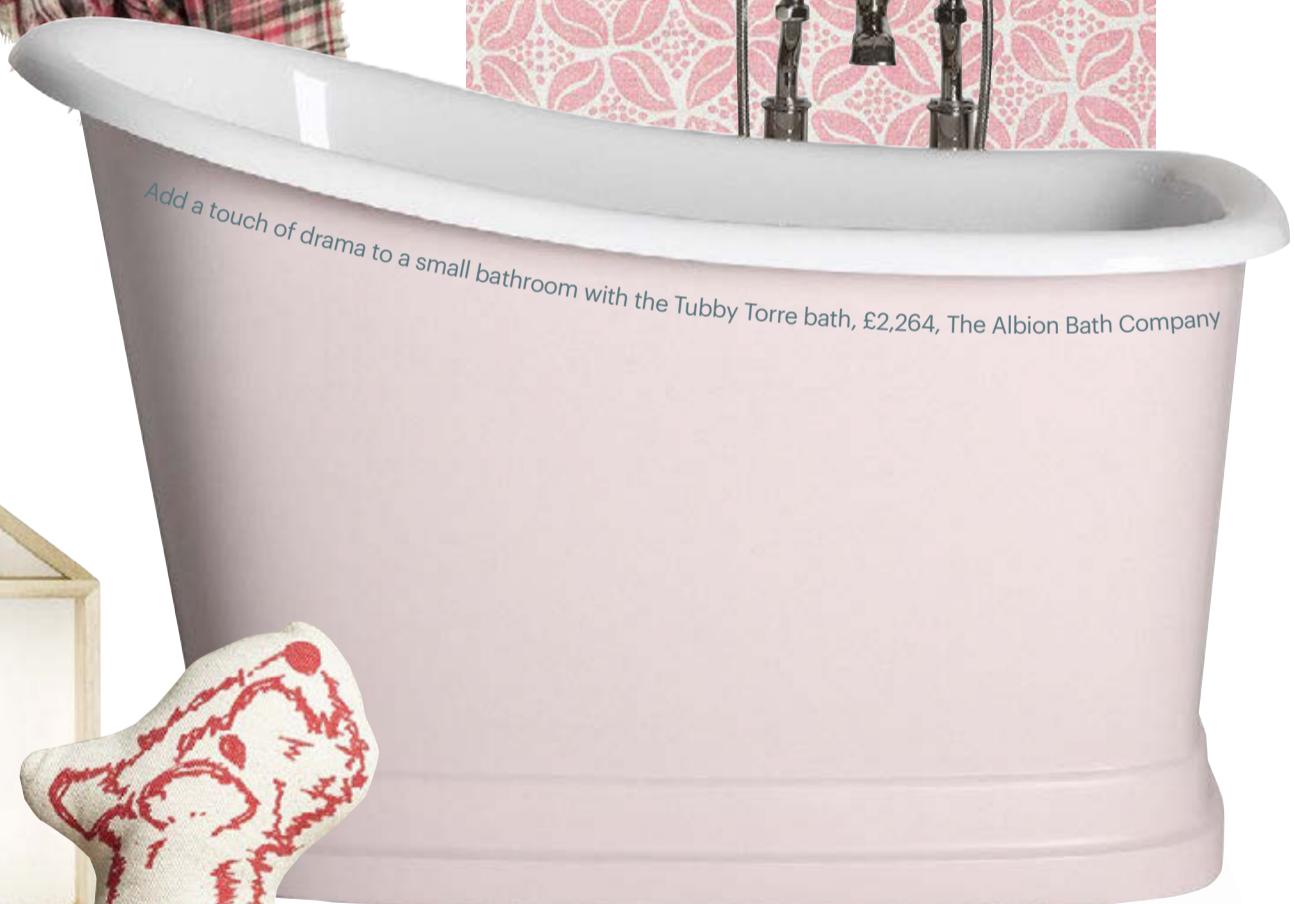
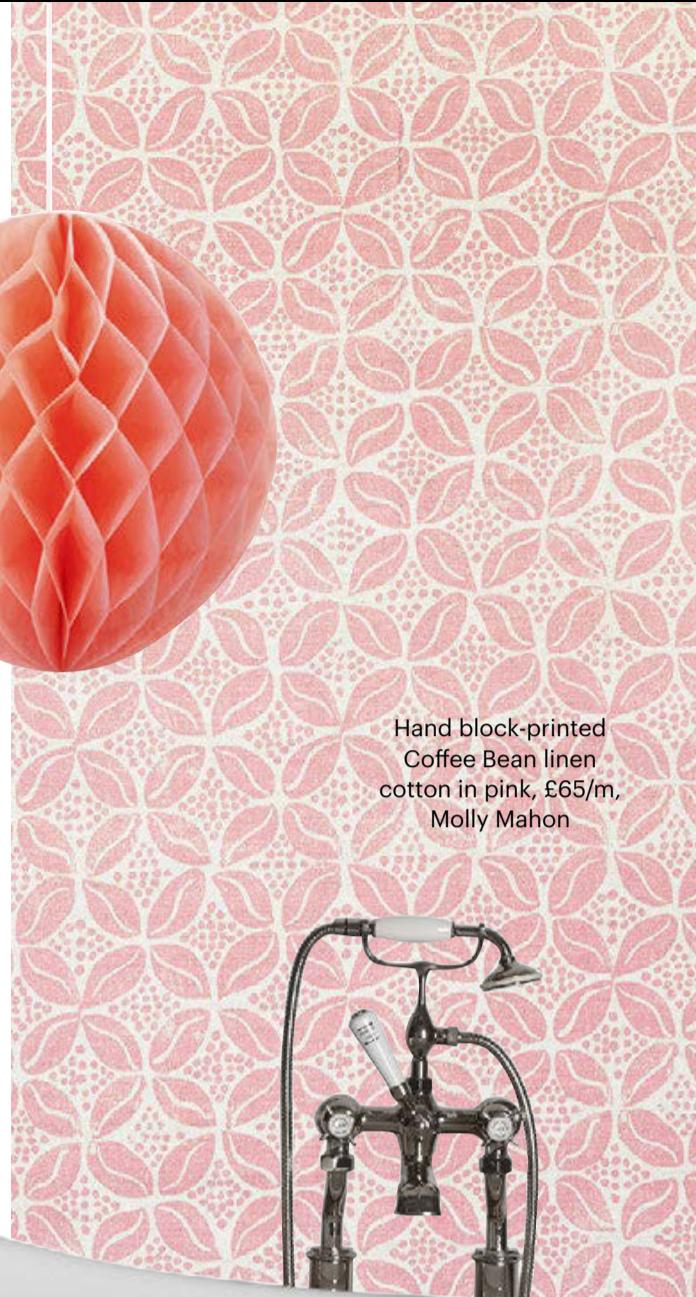
Woven in Scotland, this lightweight Menton cashmere scarf is by Begg & Co, £225, Country Living General Store



These tissue-paper sorbet-coloured honeycomb balls are perfect for a celebration, £6.75/three, Pipii



Hand block-printed Coffee Bean linen cotton in pink, £65/m, Molly Mahon



House display-shelf unit made from birch, £45, Graham & Green



Bertie the fox terrier cushion, £25, Plum & Ashby



Welsh wool chevron-weave blanket, £250, Blodwen



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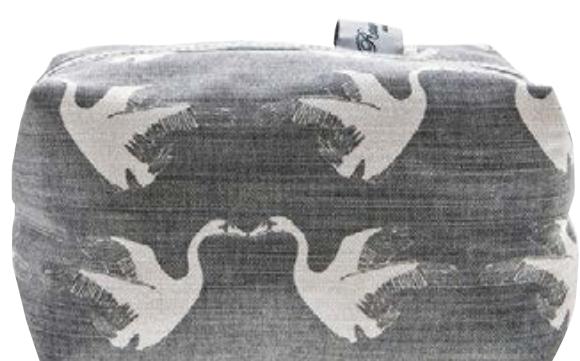
EMPORIUM

Large decorative zinc ampersand, £15, Abode

Based on a 1940s' original, this enamelled steel pendant lamp by Original BTC is £229



Cotton box bag made in Dorset, £17.95, RawXclusive



Add an elegant feel to your table with these frilly-edged linen napkins, £35 (set of four), Clarabelle Interiors



Yellow crane bird plate, £150, Claudia Rankin at Wilson Stephens & Jones



Needle-felted great tit by Little Patch, £29.99, Country Living General Store



Distressed driftwood and metal side table, £145, French Connection



For stockist details, see Where to Buy

Enjoy a cuppa in a Muscat mug by MissPrint, £12.50, Garden Trading



DECORATING

Winter WARMERS



Mix knitted, crocheted and woven wools to create a home full of comfort and charm. Offset their softness with rough textures, raw woods and exposed brick to complete the rustic effect

STYLING BY ALAINA BINKS • ASSISTED BY BEN KENDRICK • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WHITING

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PICK A PATTERN

This realistic natural wood-effect wallpaper provides an atmospheric backdrop to earthy amber and rust tones. A vintage metal trunk, pale woollen rug and large monochrome print balance the rich hues and bold cushions. ➤

i For merchandise details, see page 23



Woven wall-hanging

Weave your own piece of art using wool and a wooden knitting needle. For full details on how to make this, visit countryliving.co.uk.



Dipped detail

Give natural woven baskets a modern update using leftover paint. Dip the bottom into a tub of emulsion or eggshell paint, allowing it to create a slightly uneven top line. Hang from a washing line to dry, lightly brushing over any drips.



From old to new

Turn an old jumper – or inexpensive charity-shop buy – into a cushion cover. For full details on how to make this, visit countryliving.co.uk.



A stitch in time

String up some woollen bunting to add handmade charm to a room. Crochet individual granny squares to your desired size. Crochet a foundation chain to the length you need, fixing it onto the back of each square as you go and looping each end so you can easily hang it.

 For merchandise details, see pages 23

COUNTRY COMFORT

With its wide variety of weaves and natural flame-retardant qualities, wool fabric is a great choice for upholstery. This traditional wing-backed chair in a timeless plaid introduces pattern into a textural scheme. 



STYLE & SIMPLICITY

An upcycled chair covered in knitted wool, crocheted bunting, woven felt baskets, a plaid-covered pinboard and felt trophy head add interest to this creative and modern rustic-style workspace.

1 For merchandise details, see pages 23 and 24





IN THE WEAVE

Combine fine soft mohair and chunky knits for a cosy look that's perfect for chilly winter days.



MODERN COUNTRY

Create an inviting hallway using coarsely textured cushions, a straw-seated coppiced oak bench and a natural woven runner.



DECORATIVE & FUNCTIONAL

A display of contemporary white imprinted and cast ceramics will bring character to a sideboard.



RELAXED LIVING

Aged boards, sealed with varnish, make a rustic-style panel behind a weathered bath. A round crocheted rug adds a pretty touch. ➤

NATURAL SELECTION

Reclaimed floorboards made into a bespoke headboard can create a distinctive backdrop for a divan bed. Linen bedding, woollen cushions, woven throws and an intricately embroidered bedspread suit the relaxed mood. Pale grey and deep charcoal tones have a calm effect, while a hint of mustard yellow adds warmth.

 For merchandise details, see pages 24





SITTING ROOM

Scrapwood **wallpaper** by Piet Hein Eek (PHE-04), £199/9m roll, Rockett St George. **Curtain** in Etch charcoal (130635), £48/m, Harlequin. **Map print**, £235 for 175cm x 220cm (section shown), Surface View. **Jug picture**, from a selection, Jo Guinness. One-off glazed **cabinet** painted by Marc Kitchen-Smith, £750, Lassco. **Throw** (on cabinet) by Mourne Textiles, £285, The New Craftsmen. *In cabinet* Framed feather **artwork**, £70, Home Barn. Knit your own dog **kit**, from a selection, Muir & Osborne. **Yarns**, from £12/spool, Toft. Akiko Hirai stoneware **bottle**, from £90; Jennifer Cobham Hydra **jugs**, from £55; all Maud and Mabel. **Bowls** and **linen**, from a selection, The Conran Shop. Bluebell three-seat **sofa** in ash soft wool, £1,540, Sofa.com. **Cushions**, from left Shadow Cube wool **pillow**, £160, Melanie Porter; hand-printed curly-coated sheep **pillow**, £49, Helkat Design; checked mohair and merino-wool **pillow cover**, £75, The Conran Shop; Lion **pillow** by Lighthouse Knitwear, £135, The New Craftsmen. Mustard Fishbone wool **throw**, £60, Holly's House. Crochet Jacquard **stool**, £285, Amara. Vintage metal **trunk**, £85, Loop the Loop. **Placemat** by Mourne Textiles, £85 (set of four), The New Craftsmen. **Vases** and **vessels**, from a selection; **teacup and saucer**, £65; all Maud and Mabel. Jannu Radhi **rug**, from £324, Holly's House



FIREPLACE

St Ives **wing chair** covered in grey plaid (to order), £1,098; matching St Ives **footstool** (to order), £499; both the Country Living Collection exclusively available at DFS. Rust mohair **pillow cover**, £75, The Conran Shop. **Wool**, from a selection, Hobbycraft and John Lewis. Rustic wood **stool**, £65, Design Vintage. Miniature **jug**, £50; Akiko Hirai **mug** by Mizuyo Yamashita, £60; both Maud and Mabel. Seagrass **basket**, £23.50, Design Vintage. Honeycomb lambswool **scarf**, £68, Catherine Tough. K-Design natural **rug**, £500, The Conran Shop



PAINTED BASKET

Seagrass **basket**, £23.50, Design Vintage. Down Pipe estate **eggshell**, £20/750ml, Farrow & Ball. St Ives **wing chair** covered in grey plaid (to order), £1,098, the Country Living Collection exclusively available at DFS. Rustic wood **stool**, £65, Design Vintage. Akiko Hirai **cup**, £60, Maud and Mabel. Honeycomb lambswool **scarf**, £68, Catherine Tough. K-Design natural **rug**, £500, The Conran Shop



WORKSPACE

Distressed painted **walls** in Wimborne White estate emulsion, £36/2.5 litres; **floors** in Vert de Terre floorpaint, £22/750ml; both Farrow & Ball. Industrial hairpin-leg **table**, £450, Home Barn. Trinity **chair**, £1,000, Rose Sharp Jones.

Pinboard painted in Jack Black intelligent eggshell, £25/litre, Little Greene; covered in Woodford Plaid (DHIGWP302), £75/m, Sanderson. **Wire tray**, similar from Nkuku. Wonki Ware striped squat **mug**, £15, The Little Shed. **Yarns**, from £12/spool, Toft. Zinc storage **tins**, £9 each, Pimpernel & Partners. Cow Parsley on Linen **artwork** by Jo Butcher, from a selection, Country Living General Store. Button **card**, £10, Cloth House. **Pins**, from a selection, Hobbycraft. **Cards**, from a selection, Liberty. Framed botanical **artwork**, £70, Home Barn. **Hand-felted wren** by Fforestfelt, £150, Country Living General Store. **Books**, £22.95, Nkuku. Wire shelving **rack**, £90, Pimpernel & Partners. On rack **Folded fabrics**, from a selection, Harlequin, Fermoie and Osborne & Little. Small wooden **bowl**, £18, The Conran Shop. **Jar**, similar from Garden Trading. Vintage **threads**, from a selection, Home Barn. Hand-sculpted **cup** by Mizuyo Yamashita, £45, Maud and Mabel. **Stencil brushes** and small **paint pots**, from a 



WALL-HANGING

Wool and **knitting needle**, from a selection, John Lewis



CROCHETED GARLAND

Wool, from a selection, John Lewis. **Pinboard** covered in Woodford Plaid (DHIGWP302), £75/m, Sanderson. **Cards**, from a selection, Liberty. Framed botanical **art**, £70, Home Barn. Zinc storage **tin**, £9, Pimpernel & Partners. Hand-felted **wren** by Fforestfelt, £150, Country Living General Store. Miniature **vase** (just seen), £50, Maud and Mabel

DECORATING

selection, art shops. **Twine**, £3.60, Nutscene. **Flower snips** by Simply Roses, £5.95, Country Living General Store. **Linen**, from a selection, Cloth House. **Wool**, from a selection, Hobbycraft and John Lewis. **Vintage spool**, £12.95, Nkuku. Handmade **sheep**, £60, Mary Kilvert. Miniature **vase** by Mizuyo Yamashita, £50, Maud and Mabel. Harry Hare **animal head**, £59.95, Sew Heart Felt. Wooden **wall art**, from a selection, Jo Guinness. Vintage check **bag**, flea-market find. Woven **basket**, from £23, Design Vintage. **Yarns**, as before. Brecan wool-mix **rug**, from £195, Habitat. **Chest of drawers**, from a selection, Home Barn



DISPLAY

Knitted **decorations**, £9 each, Laura Long. Glass **bottle**, similar by LSA International. Patel handmade paper **artwork**, £200, Habitat. Forest Walk **side plate**, £14, Anthropologie. Cow Parsley on Linen **artwork** by Jo Butcher, from a selection, Country Living General Store. Lace **cup** by Clare Gage, £26, Country Living General Store. **Wooden spoon**, from a selection, The Conran Shop. Miniature **vase** by Mizuyo Yamashita, £50, Maud and Mabel. Pols Potten knitted porcelain **bowl**, £86.40, Amara. Ceramic lace **decorations**, £6.95 each, The Original Pop Up Shop. **Placemat** by Mourne Textiles, £85 (set of four), The New Craftsmen



BLANKETS

Chunky knitted **footstool**, £169, Rockett St George. **Blankets**, from top: striped mohair and merino-wool **throw**, £295, The Conran Shop; moss-stitch cotton slate-grey **throw**, £69.95, Rockett St George; cable-knit **throw**, £119.95, Nordic House; burnt-orange striped mohair and merino **throw**, £295, The Conran Shop



HALLWAY

Swill **bench**, £595, Sebastian Cox. **Cushions**, from left: Chunky cable **cushion**, £165, Rose Sharp Jones; Classic knitted **cushion**, £62, Catherine

Tough; Shell crochet **cushion**, £70, Rose Sharp Jones; Hugo Quod handknitted wool **cushion**, £155, Melanie Porter.

Scarves, gloves and hats, from a selection by Catherine Tough, Dot & Dash at Country Living General Store, Lucy Cox and Joules. Rupa iron **hooks**, £9.95, Nkuku. Framed seaweed **artwork**, £70, Home Barn.

Books, from a selection, Much Ado Books. Stitch **vase**, £12.50, Habitat at Homebase. Vintage **crochet panel** (used as blind), antiques fair find. Leather **boots**, similar from a selection, John Lewis. Wooden **baskets**, £15 each, Pimpernel & Partners. Shirley Sheep hand-felted wool children's **slippers**, £24.95, Sew Heart Felt. Reclaimed terracotta **tiles**, similar from Fired Earth. Jute **runner**, £75, Rockett St George



BEDROOM

Walls in Wimborne White estate emulsion, £36/2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball. **Headboard** made from Carpathian oak boards, from £100/sq m, Lassco. Lazy **bed linen** in grey, from £15/pillowcase, Loaf. **Cushions**, from left Mohair **cushion cover**, £75, The Conran Shop; Chunky cable **cushion**, £165, Rose Sharp Jones; Tuck **cushion** in amber, £135, Melanie Porter. Moss-stitch cotton slate-grey **throw**, £69.95, Rockett St George. Alba grey wool **throw**, £495, The Conran Shop. **Bedsheet** made from Rosaline Lace linen (F6564-02), £85/m, Osborne & Little. Chunky knitted **footstool**, £169, Rockett St George. Striped mohair and merino-wool **throw**, £295, The Conran Shop. Wool **carpet**, similar from Crucial Trading. Crochet wool **rug**, £199, Marks & Spencer. Driftwood **side table**, £95, French Connection. Porcelain **jug** by Clare Gage, £26, Country Living General Store. Small concrete **lamp**, £99, Toast. **Shutter panel**, similar from St Aidan's Homeware Store. Hanging **heart**, from a selection, Jo Guinness. Jug relief **engraving** by Cornelia O'Donovan, £65, The New Craftsmen. Ceramic **cup**, from a selection, Alice Garland. Teacup **artwork**, from a selection, The Bell Jar

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a month in the country

WHAT TO SEE February



A VISION OF VIOLETS

With its delicate fan of purple-blue petals opening from February onwards amid dark-green heart-shaped leaves, the appearance of the common dog violet (*viola riviniana*) is aptly timed for Valentine's Day. The most common wild member of the viola family, this scentless flower grows in hedgerows, woodland clearings and on hillsides, although it's also worth keeping an eye out for its scented cousin the sweet violet (*viola odorata*), which can appear in similar habitats in a wider range of colours, including white and pale pink. For centuries, the sweet violet has been revered for its distinctive scent, which was used as deodorant in medieval Britain and as perfume in ancient Greece. Interestingly, the flower also contains ionone, a chemical that deadens our scent receptors, but fortunately not enough to affect the fragrance. See them blooming profusely in the British countryside from now and throughout spring.

If you've time...

Plant native varieties of the flower in your garden – violets grow well in shaded or wooded parts, preferring moist but well-drained soil. Deadhead them regularly to prolong the display.

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD AND CHARLOTTE DEAR

what's happening...



in nature

Hanging like soft, golden icicles from the branches of hazel trees (*Corylus avellana*) are the clusters of male catkins, which appear this month. The tiny, red bud-like flowers of the female are an important source of early pollen for bees. As the year progresses, leaf-encased nuts will form – spot tits, woodpeckers and nuthatches seeking them out in autumn.



down on the farm

Thanks to increasing temperatures and an abundance of grass brought on by winter showers, this year's lambs will appear outside in February, frisking around fields. Farmers often place expectant ewes in a field near the farmyard to keep an eye on them, but they are mostly able to lamb without assistance. A ewe usually produces one or two young (the record stands at nine). After vigorous licking by its mother, a newborn lamb will stand just half an hour after birth. 

A TASTE OF THE GOOD LIFE... THIS MONTH, PLANNING A CUT-FLOWER GARDEN



Follow River Cottage florist Emma Vowles' tips for growing blooms to ensure your home is always filled with colour and fragrance

Sapphire-blue cornflowers, golden marigolds, pink and purple foxgloves and delicately scented sweet peas: a traditional country cutting garden is a joy to behold. And the good news is that it's easy to create your own at home, whatever the size of your plot. Start preparing the soil now, weeding, then forking through rich organic matter to increase fertility and moisture retention. If the spot you're planting in is sunny and warm, sow seeds into dry ground, spacing them according to the packet instructions. In colder areas, establish your plants indoors and transfer them to your garden following the last frosts. For plenty to pick through the seasons, grow and stagger annuals, perennials, bulbs, shrubs and climbers. Varieties to sow now for spring-to-autumn colour include snapdragons, cosmos and dahlias, as well as Bells of Ireland and eucalyptus for greenery. Keep the soil around them weed free and, once they flower, harvest regularly – the more you pick, the more will come again.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Despite many British blooms being available year round, 90 per cent of cut flowers sold in this country are imported, nearly double that of 20 years ago. For a seasonal bouquet, visit flowersfromthefarm.co.uk, which lists British growers.

EASY GROWING IDEAS

PLAN YOUR PLOT

Sowing in rows will make it simpler to weed between, stake and pick your plants.

BE NATURAL Use twigs as frames and trellis for climbers – sweet peas look lovely trained up branches of silver birch, for example.

KEEP CONTROL Plant vigorous growers in pots to prevent them dominating your patch.



A SIMPLE MAKE... PRIMROSE PLANTERS

Celebrate the coming of spring with this delicate indoor display

- 1 Put a 1cm-layer of gravel or woodchips at the bottom of a pretty china bowl or cup with saucer.
- 2 Position two primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) plants in the centre and fill in any gaps with potting compost.
- 3 Decorate the surface with pieces of sphagnum moss, then water well.
- 4 Display in a cool place, out of direct sunlight. After a couple of weeks, you can transfer the plants to a shady spot in your garden, where they will thrive and multiply for months to come.

Taken from *Inspire – The Art of Living with Nature* by Willow Crossley (Cico Books, £16.99).*

3 COURSES... IN WEAVING

- 1 **The Textile Space** **Charlton, Chichester, West Sussex** Create your own chunky rug on a traditional peg loom, using recycled fabrics and Goodwood Estate organic sheep fleece. There's a chance to buy a loom, too. 26 February; £62 (01243 811300; thetextilespace.co.uk).
- 2 **The Loom Room** **Lower Tean, Staffordshire** Find out how to read patterns, set up your loom and use colour in a tailor-made course that can last from two days to two weeks. Dates available on request; from £390 (07805 083696; theloomroom.co.uk).
- 3 **Snail Trail Handweavers** **Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire** Master the art outdoors, weather permitting, with homemade refreshments and views of a wild-flower meadow. Accommodation offered. Dates available on request; from £60 (01239 841228; snail-trail.co.uk). 



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NEPTUNE

MEET A COUNTRY CHARACTER



The black poplar (*Populus nigra*) is Britain's rarest native timber tree. In order to save the species, Buckinghamshire-based Roger Jefcoate (above) has been planting cuttings nationwide since 1975, including at Buckingham Palace, Chequers and Sandringham. The Aylesbury Vale in his home county is a stronghold, with around half the country's population: "When I heard about the plight of the tree, and knew some were growing nearby, I had to do something," says the phantom planter, who also grows specimens in a field for the purpose of taking cuttings. By planting females in male-dominated sites and vice versa, Roger has helped to re-establish the species. "I plant 100 cuttings every year, and give 100 away," he says. "When I pass by ones I established 40 years ago and see them thriving, I get a real buzz." *The UK Black Poplar Conservation Group is holding an open conference on 9 March in Hertfordshire. To find out more, email johnandmargaret@noakes.co.uk.*

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Cwm

A Welsh word, meaning 'valley', with the same derivation as the Old English *comb*, *combe* and *coombe*. *Glascwm* in Powys is 'the grey-green valley'; *Templecombe* in Somerset was the site of the Templar preceptory before c1185.*



NEWS YOU CAN USE

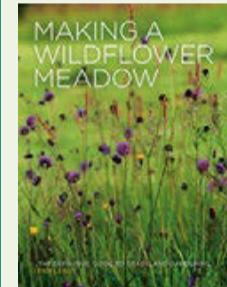
After 140 years of decline, the number of red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) in Britain is on the rise and, thanks to leafless trees and courting animals being less wary than usual, February is the perfect month to spot them. Since the introduction of the invasive grey in 1876, which spread the adenovirus and monopolised the native squirrels' habitat, reds in this country have dropped from around 3.5 million to 120,000. But, thanks to conservation projects such as the RSPB's Giving Nature a Home campaign, its fortunes have changed. In 2012, Red Squirrels Northern England monitored 300 woodland sites and found the animal present in 155 of them; since then, occupancy has increased by 12 per cent. Give them your support by contacting your local red squirrel group about conservation projects, or visiting the Red Squirrel Survival Trust website, rsst.org.uk, for more information.



Eco tip

Remove home pollutants with plants: gerberas can combat benzene (in detergents); moth orchids will tackle formaldehyde in new paint; and peace lilies absorb mould spores.

FROM YOUR ARMCHAIR



Help to preserve native species of plants with Pam Lewis's expertise. Whether you've a small garden or several acres, this guide has advice to get you started (Frances Lincoln, £14.99).**

5 LEARNING BREAKS

3

For foodies Build your own cob pizza oven and learn how to use it in idyllic surroundings near Filby Broad in Norfolk. Various Saturdays from 21 March, £80 (01493 369952; cobcourses.com).

1

For crafters Discover how to make lace using traditional methods while staying at Manor Farm B&B in Oxfordshire. 14-15 May, £150 (01235 833453; ardingtonschoolofcrafts.com).

4

For nature-seekers Catch sight of honey buzzards on one of John Davis's wildlife walking tours in Wales. Dates on request; from £230 (01970 890281; midwalesbirdwatching.co.uk).

2

For budding writers Put pen to paper in the Highlands as award-winning Mandy Haggith shares her tips for creating a bestselling novel. 31 May-5 June, £525 (01571 844100; glencanisp-lodge.co.uk).

5

For animal-lovers Feed pigs and herd sheep before eating a home-grown meal in a Wiltshire farmhouse. Accommodation provided. 13-15 March, free (01793 771080; lowershawfarm.co.uk).



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N
NEPTUNE



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT

While staying at Blue Door Barns, make the most of the area by enjoying local produce, discovering independent shops and exploring the countryside



A NIGHT AND A DAY IN... LEWES

Stay...

At Blue Door Barns in Beddingham, three miles from the East Sussex market town. Choose from four individually decorated rooms, once the workshops of Bloomsbury's Quentin Bell. Surrounding a courtyard, they are decorated in greys and blues and filled with antique French furniture and vintage finds. Breakfast is served in owners Bryony Johnson and Emma Basden's drawing room and begins with yogurt, fruit and honey, followed by sausages, eggs and bacon from nearby Middle Farm, or cinnamon French toast. Double B&B from £110 (01273 858893; bluedoorbarns.com).

Eat...

At Limetree Kitchen, where head chef and proprietor Alex Von Riebech's dishes demonstrate attention to detail and local provenance. Enjoy roasted roots with raspberry and goats' cheese, sea bass with fennel rosti and almond panna cotta with homemade sorbet (01273 478636; limetreekitchen.co.uk). Stop for coffee at Lewesiana florist and tearoom – don't miss the peanut butter squares (01273 480822; lewestiana.co.uk). For Sunday lunch, head to nearby Firle's The Ram Inn, where the menu includes game from the Firle Estate and mackerel caught by the vicar (01273 858222; raminn.co.uk).

Browse...

Flint Owl Bakery for an array of sourdough breads, pastries and cakes (flintowlbakery.com). Cheese Please stocks its own Great Taste Award-winning chutney as well as local cheeses and condiments, including Mrs Cooks Piccalilli and produce from High Weald Dairy (01273 481048). The Needlemakers houses shops full of jewellery, personalised gifts and specialist fabrics and craft accessories (needlemakers.co.uk). Ten minutes out of town is Middle Farm, where you'll find everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to home-produced meats and draught ciders (middlefarm.com).

Don't miss Lewes Farmers' Market on the first and third Saturdays of the month. Some 35 producers set up stalls on Cliffe precinct from 9am-1pm, offering an array of staple and specialist local and seasonal produce.

FURTHER AFIELD



If staying at Blue Door Barns, a visit to **Charleston** (above) is a must. The country meeting place for the writers, painters and intellectuals of the Bloomsbury group, the house and walled garden are fascinating to explore (charleston.org.uk). **Michelham Priory** dates back to 1229 and has a working watermill, roundhouse, forge and plenty of activities, including exhibitions, fairs and themed days (01273 474610).

Make the most of the Sussex coastline at **Seven Sisters**

Country Park. Walk or cycle the 692 acres of chalk cliffs or follow the meandering **River Cuckmere** to the beach (sevensisters.org.uk).



LOCAL LANDMARK

Built in 1069, Lewes Castle stands at the highest point of the town. Climb to the top of the Norman fort for magnificent views

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; CHARLOTTE DEAR; GETTY; DEREK PELLING. ILLUSTRATIONS BY JO BIRD

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READING THE LANDSCAPE

shingle

In his quarterly series, author and natural history writer **Patrick Barkham** walks through different areas of the British countryside, celebrating their features and revealing the forces that have shaped them

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANGELA HARDING

It is a scene of desolation on the edge of Suffolk. Beyond a wintry sea the colour of bronze, a great shingle bank is convulsed by corrugated iron, tangled metal and 50 ruined buildings. The place appears to have been blown up overnight, but the destruction was a much slower attrition by salty winds and sea water. This is Orford Ness, a peninsula of pebbles stretching south for ten miles from Aldeburgh, the strangest, most compelling length of coast in the country: a wilderness of hazardous waste and abundant wildlife.

For much of the 20th century, it was a secret military site: the inaccessibility and yet relative proximity to the capital made it ideal for secret experiments. From 1913 until the tail-end of the Cold War, British 'boffins' (the word was invented on the Ness) tested aircraft, bombs and other weapons here. This activity ended in 1987 and the Ness became a nature reserve in 1993 when the Ministry of Defence sold it to the National Trust. The derelict laboratories on the beach, nicknamed the pagodas, are the most alarming feature of the landscape. Their overhanging roofs are piled high with stones, which made them look like poisonous mushrooms on the day I trudged, alone, across the shingle.

The spit is known locally as 'the island' and access is forbidden via the long beach beyond Aldeburgh, so it's a case of boarding the National Trust ferry at the tiny harbour of Orford to cross the brown River Ore, then taking a track across the grazing marshes, once a landing strip. I carefully followed a marked path along the pebbles, which were moulded by the sea into subtle furrows. Visitors are required to stick to the trail in order to protect these fragile ridges and the mosaic of tiny plants they support, which would be quickly

destroyed if walked upon. The rule also protects us: the area is still riddled with unexploded bombs.

The geological form of Orford Ness is relatively recent. Unlike landscapes of granite or chalk created over millions of years, it took its basic shape in medieval times. Longshore drift pushed small rounded flints south from the crumbling cliffs of Dunwich, the famous port that has fallen into the waves over the past eight centuries, to form the Ness. Moulded and remoulded by the sea in front of it and the river behind, it is the largest vegetated shingle spit in Europe, an arid ecosystem of pebble-loving, salt-tolerant plants. In summer, it is bleak, breezy and hot; today, in midwinter, it is bleak, windy and cold.

A National Trust Ranger lives permanently on the peninsula in the huddle of preserved military buildings behind a sea bank, but there were no people around when I stepped tentatively through the windy silence to Lab 1, the first of the ruined concrete buildings. At its doorway, there was a wild shriek and I jumped out of my skin before I realised the screams came from several jackdaws, huddling in a rusty vent.

Flat and low-lying, the Ness is a landscape of horizontals. Any vertical line – such as a person – is immediately visible. The peninsula's inhabitants were wary of me. Two hares sloped away and black-backed gulls floated up from the pagodas' shingle roofs. Later, I was watched by a furtive Chinese water deer, a delicate creature with sinister fangs. It felt as if I was the last person left alive on earth. The animals have thrived since the bombing stopped but wildlife had always done well on the Ness: restricting human access helps most wild creatures. I spotted a barn owl (the record sighting is an impressive nine individuals here) and a short-eared owl on the marshes; during winter, rare migrants are often blown ashore; ➤

Orford Ness is the largest vegetated shingle spit in Europe, an arid ecosystem of pebble-loving, salt-tolerant plants – in summer, it is bleak, breezy and hot; in midwinter, it is bleak, windy and cold





in spring, cuckoos call, green woodpeckers visit to feed on ant hills, and marsh harriers breed among the reeds. Close to the buildings – and, occasionally, on their roofs – thousands of seabirds make their nests, although numbers of black-backed gulls have plummeted from 20,000 a decade ago to just 450, possibly partly because of predation by foxes. Otters are also increasing in number and probably raiding some ground-nesting birds.

Like the landscape itself, with a palette of beige, brown and grey-green, which hardly changes with the seasons, shingle's unique plants are subtle and small. Only modest patches of bright colour appear in summer, when the yellow-horned poppy flowers, and sea holly is sculptural and a striking shade of pale peppermint. Sea pea disappears from view in winter but its roots remain and its seeds can survive in salt water: it spreads out like a low weed in great mats on the strandline in summer. The edible plant reputedly kept the people of Aldeburgh from starving during a 16th-century drought: crops failed but it survived on dry shingle, drawing moisture from dew and spray from the sea. Another wild food plant is sea kale, which produces cream blooms in spring and tastes like slightly bitter spinach when I picked and steamed it.

Walking on shingle saps your strength and makes you stumble, so I welcomed the remnant of cracked concrete road between the labs. I peered inside these ruined buildings, wondering what they would ➤

Close to the buildings – and, occasionally, on their roofs – thousands of seabirds make their nests

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NATURE

tell me. Officially, the secret site never housed fissile material but the truth about the secret past of Orford Ness remains as uncertain as its constantly changing physical form.

Alone in this bewildering landscape, which warps any sense of time, season and scale, I finished my walk by seeking out the most comforting element: the red-and-white striped lighthouse by the sea. Unlike every other building on the Ness, this had been designed to save lives. I sat on the beach and listened to the conversational chatter of the waves rolling onto the shingle. The ruins of the Ness are testimony to the inventiveness and destructiveness of the 20th century but now they say more about the enduring power of the sea. The concrete laboratories are decaying so quickly that there will be little trace of the Cold War on this ridge of shingle in a few decades. And the physical form of the spit is not much sturdier. It is unlikely to remain an 'untrue island', as the writer Robert Macfarlane describes it, because it is growing longer and slimmer. At some point this century, the rising sea is likely to detach it from the mainland and new mysteries will swirl around Orford Ness. 



R. Harding

ON THE TRAIL

*Enjoy Patrick's walk along
Orford Ness by following
his guide*

**Length: two miles, which takes
approximately one hour**

STARTING POINT

Orford Quay, where the National Trust
ferry leaves for Orford Ness

REFERENCES

OS Map: Explorer 212, Woodbridge &
Saxmundham

Part of the magic of Orford Ness is its inaccessibility. Visitors are only allowed onto the peninsula via the National Trust ferry at Orford Quay on open days. Orford Ness is closed until 4 April 2015, from when it is open only on Saturdays until early July because of the bird-nesting season. The boat departs between 10am and 2pm, with the last back from the Ness at 5pm. There is a limited number of tickets each day.

I followed the 'red route', which is marked out by red posts. This takes you over marshes and dunes and across the shingle. You can wander out to the lighthouse and follow the markers on a loop around the crumbling military installations. Several other delineating paths can be taken across the marshes but these are closed during the nesting season. The Trust also runs guided walks that enable visitors to look inside some of the pagodas (book in advance). See nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness.

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JOIN OUR
CAMPAIGN



ROOTS of INSPIRATION

Many of our nation's ancient and veteran trees have influenced great moments in history and inspired celebrated figures in science, politics, literature and art to make era-defining achievements. Yet they remain without any official status – while some bear plaques acknowledging their part in an event, they are not valued as greatly as a man-made structure such as a listed building or artwork. In partnership with the Woodland Trust, *Country Living* is aiming to change that by calling for the recognition of the UK's Very Important Trees. Here, we honour the part they have played in our culture and heritage

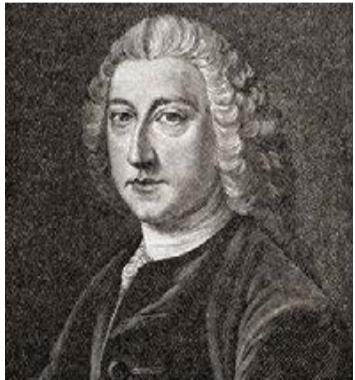


MAKING HISTORY

Great trees have always beguiled us. Their endurance, character and beauty draw men, women and children to think and discuss, rest and dream beneath their boughs. As nature's shelters, they have served as important meeting places and many key political decisions have been made as a result of conversations held under a wide, leafy canopy. One of the greatest examples is the ancient oak that stood in the grounds of Holwood House in Keston, Kent, where, following a discussion with William Pitt the Younger, his fellow politician and friend William Wilberforce resolved to abolish the slave trade. The moment is summarised in an extract from Wilberforce's diary in 1787, which was later included in a biography by his sons: "At length, I well remember, after a conversation in the open air at the root of an old tree at Holwood just above the steep descent into the vale of Keston, I resolved to give notice on a fit occasion in the House of Commons of my intention to bring the subject forward." The specimen became known as the Wilberforce Oak but was sadly lost to high winds recently. It is now commemorated with a sign.

More than five centuries before this momentous occasion, another landmark political event is believed to have happened by the now 2,000-year-old Ankerwycke Yew at Runnymede in Surrey: the sealing of the Magna Carta by King John in 1215. Among numerous other consequences, this document greatly improved the relationship between monarchs and their subjects from that point on.

Science owes a large debt to a now-ancient apple tree in the garden of a modest Lincolnshire house. In the 1660s, Sir Isaac Newton famously formulated his theories about gravitational force inspired by observing the way its fruit fell to the ground. Visitors to Woolsthorpe Manor, now owned by the National Trust, can still see the tree from a



THIS PAGE The ancient apple tree in Lincolnshire (top left) inspired Newton's (above left) thoughts on gravity, while politicians Pitt (above) and Wilberforce (left) debated policies on the slave trade under the oak at Keston (far left)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; BROMLEY LOCAL STUDIES AND ARCHIVES; © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES
JOHN HAMMOND/© NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES; © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES



bedroom window (nationaltrust.org.uk/woolsthorpe-manor). As well as the catalysts for ideas that shaped society, some trees have become associated with historical figures, revealing that person's simple appreciation of these living landmarks. When she stopped in Northiam, East Sussex, on her way to Rye, Elizabeth I found that an old oak on the village green was the perfect place to rest and take a meal. As she changed her footwear for the onward journey, she chose to leave her green silk damask shoes as a gift to the tree, which is today completely hollow and bears a plaque testifying to the royal encounter.

INSPIRING A RICH CULTURE

From the principal subject in fine-art masterpieces to the inspiration for musical compositions, the role that ancient and veteran trees have played in our cultural heritage is too vast to quantify. Try to picture a work by Constable without a charismatic oak, a pollarded willow or a statuesque elm, a species once common in his beloved East Anglia... The artist even produced a series of arboreal studies, including oil sketches of a trunk showing the beauty of the bark in great detail. Constable's contemporary and biographer Charles Robert Leslie summarised the painter's passion: "I have seen him admire a fine tree with an ecstasy of delight like that with which he would catch up a beautiful child in his arms."

Nineteenth-century poet John Clare felt a strong affinity with the Northamptonshire countryside where he lived and was deeply affected by the loss of old trees, a common occurrence during his lifetime due to the Enclosure Acts. He wrote an entire poem entitled *The Fallen Elm*, including the lines: "Old favourite tree, thou'st seen time's changes lower/Though change till now did never injure thee/For time beheld thee as her sacred dower/And nature claimed thee her domestic tree."

The Niel Gow Oak, on the bank of the River Tay, is credited with sheltering the Perthshire fiddler while he composed his most celebrated strathspey and reel music in the 18th century. Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has installed a bench

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; CULTURE-IMAGES/LEBRECHT



THIS PAGE Trees have moved notable figures such as poet John Clare (left), Elizabeth I (far left), who rested beneath the Northiam oak (top left), and artist Constable, who painted Salisbury (top) and a study of an elm (above)

JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN



THIS PAGE Historic creatives who have been inspired by ancient oaks include Niel Gow (right), who composed in the shelter of a specimen on the River Tay (above), and poet William Cowper (far right)



beside it and dedicated it to Gow. "Accessed by the Fiddlers Path, it gives visitors a chance to sense the inspiration that helped him create memorable tunes," says an FCS spokesman.

A charismatic specimen called the Barrington Oak is the subject of an anonymous painting from the late 18th century, in which its branches billow across the scene and its broad trunk stands gnarled and hollowing – as it continues to do so in the parkland of the privately owned Essex estate in 2015.

These examples represent a fraction of the debt we owe ancient and veteran trees – they have shaped history, and moved artists, composers and writers to produce a wealth of work that we continue to enjoy today, so surely they deserve our respect? "The reason we still have so many old

trees and can share their incredible stories today is because generations of owners have loved and cared for them to ensure their survival," says Jill Butler, ancient tree advisor for the Woodland Trust. "They are now important not only to those local people, but to the whole of society and they deserve to be recognised as such. In the same way we give medals to Olympians, or mark the homes of famous residents with a blue plaque, these trees should be recognised."

i Please help Country Living and the Woodland Trust secure their status with a national register in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which will honour and celebrate Very Important Trees. See box above.



IT TAKES TWO MINUTES TO HELP US PROTECT THE COUNTRY'S MOST PRECIOUS TREES

The *Country Living* and Woodland Trust Very Important Trees campaign is calling for politicians to acknowledge the value of these national treasures, starting with 40 particularly special ones – each singled out by the conservation charity either for its association with historic events and figures, certain characteristics or awe-inspiring proportions – and give them the recognition they deserve. Simply visit countryliving.co.uk and click on Very Important Trees. You can then add your support to the call for a register of these great living UK landmarks.

THREE MORE LITERARY OAKS

Charles Dickens

Dickens' Oak stands on a roadside in Chigwell, Essex, and has a girth of almost six metres. It is thought to be the model for the Maypole in the Victorian author's novel *Barnaby Rudge*.

William Wordsworth

In Wordsworth's autobiographical work *The Prelude*, the poet describes 18th-century political thinker and writer Edmund Burke as "...old, but vigorous in age/ Stand like an oak whose stag-horn branches start/ Out of its leafy brow, the more to awe/The younger brethren of the grove..."

William Cowper

Eighteenth-century poet Cowper likens himself to a "shatter'd veteran, hollow-trunk'd perhaps now" in his poem *Yardley Oak*.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; GEORGE LOGAN/SCOTTISH PHOTOGRAPHY CO.UK

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A SENSE OF SPACE



Even the smallest home can be made to feel light and spacious. Make the most of every spare inch with these stylish ideas

WORDS BY SARA EMSLIE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WHITING



Maximise unused
roof space by creating
a mezzanine level



OPPOSITE In this coastal home, the roof space has been utilised by creating a mezzanine level, accessed by a nautical-style ladder, to add architectural interest as well as a

functional sleeping zone **LEFT** A raised sleeping area is a great idea for a bedroom. Glass panels above the level of the bed screen the room during the day and curtains block out the light at night



ABOVE Removing a suspended ceiling will provide additional storage space and bring more light into a small kitchen as well as helping to make it considerably larger **LEFT** Exposed wooden beams are superb architectural features that can also form useful ready-made partitions between mezzanine spaces. Here, tiny alcoves, positioned next to the staircase, provide additional storage



IDEAS TO INSPIRE

There are many ways to alter a small home, from knocking down internal walls to exposing unused loft and roof areas. Central staircases and chimney breasts can sometimes be removed to make extra space, but major structural changes such as these can completely alter the feel of an older property, so give them serious consideration before embarking on any radical redesign. If you have high ceilings or extra roof space, then creating a mezzanine level for a raised sleeping or work area is a particularly effective way of making additional room and freeing up valuable floor space. Lofts can be converted into stylish attic bedrooms, provided you can fit in a connecting staircase, while a cellar or basement level could be damp-proofed and transformed into a cosy kitchen, indulgent bathroom or practical playroom, perhaps.

DESIGN AND DECORATION

Dual-purpose rooms are great space savers. A kitchen with a deep breakfast bar might eliminate the need for a separate dining table. A tiny spare room or an unused alcove in an open-plan living room could be transformed into a compact home office with a hinged worksurface that folds away after use. Or use an area under the stairs for a wardrobe with built-in shelving and a hanging rail, or even a tiny shower room.





Clever use of alcoves, loft areas and a palette of muted shades helps to create the illusion of space

OPPOSITE Dark, shadowy tones can work well in small spaces, particularly those where a subdued mood is required. A restricted palette of a few complementary hues, such as shades

of grey, black and inky blue, looks the most effective

LEFT Opening up a ceiling brings a feeling of space to a compact home, and highlights the colours of a room to great effect



ABOVE A dark grey colour scheme allows the shower space to recede almost out of sight when viewed from the other end of this room. Every inch of space has been used, with a tiny alcove built in for soaps and lotions, and a recessed bench area for storing towels

LEFT This dining room effortlessly combines style and functionality, with slimline wood and metal bistro-style chairs, calm off-white walls and natural textures





Carefully chosen storage ideas are not only functional but can also become strong design features

STORAGE

Having plenty of places to store your personal possessions is vital, especially when space is at a premium – be imaginative and try incorporating these areas into all sorts of nooks and crannies. A mezzanine level, for example, can accommodate cupboards that will neatly fit into the eaves of the roof, fully maximising this unused area, while wooden cabin-style beds fit snugly in a small bedroom with drawers built in underneath for additional storage. Benches or banquets with space inside can be designed to suit a particular spot, and made-to-measure shelves will transform awkwardly shaped alcoves. Open-plan units can even be constructed to cover an entire wall, not only providing great storage but creating a distinctive design element, too. 

LEFT Industrial-style trolleys provide versatile storage and fit well into the corners of a room

BELOW A hanging rail for utensils keeps them easily to hand while making the most of this deep kitchen window





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ALL IN — THE — DETAIL

Many different elements can be used to give a garden real depth and interest, so if you are planning changes to the hard landscaping or the planting in your plot, take inspiration from these creative design solutions

WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE GARRETT

This intricate pebble mosaic path might be a touch ambitious for a first project, but master the techniques and, with time and patience, it is possible to create something eye-catching and original



Creeping thymes are ideal for planting in the crevices of an informal path; they are very forgiving of being stepped on and reward you by releasing their aromatic fragrance



Sinuous water-filled rills echo the curves of the path, which might otherwise be lost by the softening effect of the plants; it combines sophisticated design with child-safe entertainment



WALK THIS WAY

A path can be so much more than a functional route from one area to another – choose a surface that complements your style of garden and it will become an attractive feature in its own right. Mixed materials, or a gently meandering route, can make all the difference, while still retaining the path's practicality. Recycled bricks or setts can be cleverly combined with new paving to give an instant effect of age.



Stones positioned 'edge-on' form an interesting textured path, which tends to be less slippery than when they are laid flat; wide, shallow steps contained within metal edging divide the slope



Rills packed with sawn logs give a hoggin path (compacted sand, silt and stone) textural interest – the addition of gravel between the logs would make it more practical for a garden setting



The use of rough weathered stone surrounded by naturalistic planting re-creates a limestone pavement habitat; stone like this should always be sourced from a reputable supplier

Silene fimbriata is an attractive white campion that is perfectly happy in dry shade; plant this perennial in well-cultivated enriched soil and it will bulk up in this most demanding of habitats



White spikes of *veronicastrum* twist upwards beneath a pleached lime tree, contrasting with the blue spires of agastache, white *Veronica spicata* and the spreading heads of *Ammi majus*



Agastache 'Blue Fortune' creates strong verticals among delicate flowerheads of *Deschampsia flexuosa*. Although fairly short-lived, this agastache is a star performer, loved by bees and butterflies



PLANTING PALETTES

Whether your taste is for cool, warm or vibrant colours, keeping to one group of hues will give your planting scheme consistency. Visually, the cooler blue palette appears to recede and can make a small space seem larger, while the warmer red group advances and creates a feeling of intimacy. A vibrant spectrum incorporates colour clashes, which add excitement and drama – a bold choice for the more confident gardener.



Spires of yellow eremurus combine with achilleas in shades of yellow and terracotta and Agastache 'Blue Fortune'; a garden-building scaffolding pole has been painted a matching bold yellow



A blue-tinged white hydrangea looks eye-catching planted with trailing ivy in an elegant antique container; acid soil produces blue hydrangea flowers, while alkaline soil will result in pink blooms



Intermingling with the golden seed heads of *Stipa gigantea*, *Agapanthus 'Northern Star'* bears deep blue buds and cobalt flowers with a darker stripe; this variety blooms for six weeks

Aquilegia vulgaris 'Nora Barlow' is an old-fashioned cottage-garden favourite for light shade; it grows easily from seed but, like all aquilegias, will cross-pollinate in the garden



Aquilegia vulgaris 'Black Barlow' is the dark-hued cousin of 'Nora Barlow'; in this scheme, it has been combined with the red flowers of *Heuchera* 'Firefly' and cerise-pink *Cirsium rivulare*



Striking balls of woven wire rest on a bed of mosses, ivy and *sempervivums*; in this style of planting, which is ideal for green roofs or walls, the balls add height and highlight the red tones



Height, shape, scent and flowering season are other factors to consider when creating a planting scheme



The golden-hued Japanese shield fern *Dryopteris erythrosa* picks up the lighter shades of nearby *achillea*, and contrasts with the warm reds and purples of the bloodgrass *Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra'



Phlox 'Velvet Flame' is the perfect candidate for introducing vibrant colour to the border; here, its impact is softened slightly by the flowering stems of *Deschampsia flexuosa*



Hovering above a carpet of *Achillea* 'Paprika', the similarly hued *Echinacea* 'Sunset' provides contrasting shape and texture in this simple but richly coloured planting scheme

GARDENING

Bespoke mosaic paving, which creates the effect of cracked earth, is used above and below water in a Chelsea show garden to highlight the issue of drought and water conservation



A granite-edged pond filled with large pebbles is the centrepiece of a small garden where textures, rather than colour, provide the interest; reflections in the water add a further dimension



A water-bearing wooden rill, above a block of box topiary, creates a cascade into the pond below where marginal plants, including hostas and *Iris sibirica*, thrive in the damp conditions



WATER WAYS

Water adds another element – quite literally – to the garden. Still ponds, pools and gently flowing rills encourage calm and contemplation, and reflect their surroundings in the glassy surface. Running water energises as it cascades from waterspouts or splashes from fountains and introduces an extra dimension of sound, which can mask less welcome noise, especially in urban settings. All water, still or moving, will bring wildlife into the garden.



The sleek appearance of a black Corian pond is softened by a planting that includes bearded iris, aquilegias and hardy geraniums; the wall behind is topped with reclaimed bicycle wheels

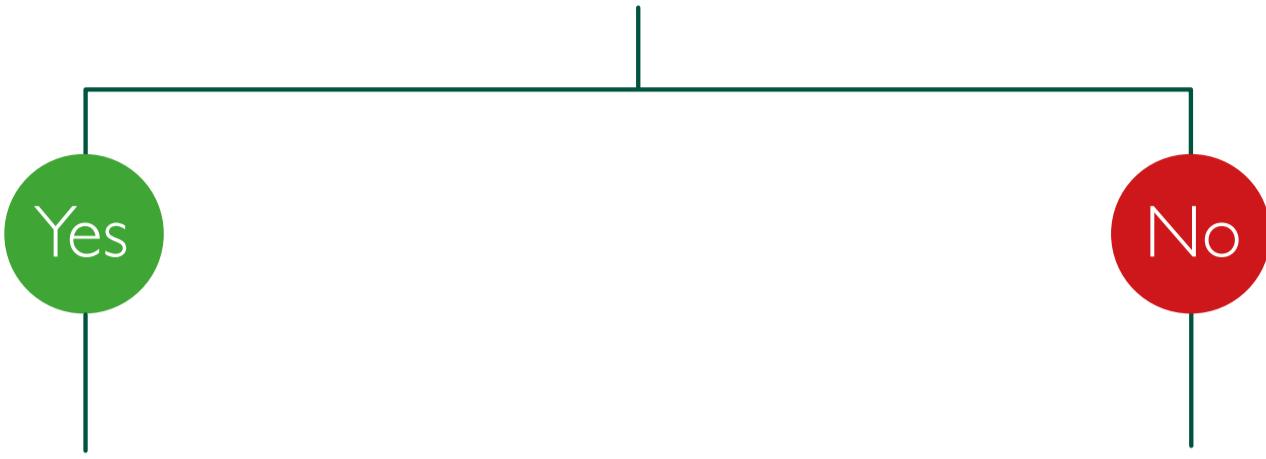


A cottage-garden planting of lupins and penstemon surrounds a birdbath featuring a sculpture of three swallows; a birdbath can introduce the element of water to the smallest green space



A rill formed from galvanised metal intersects a hoggin surface alongside a display of topiary beech; contemporary design is generally most successful when it is kept simple ➤

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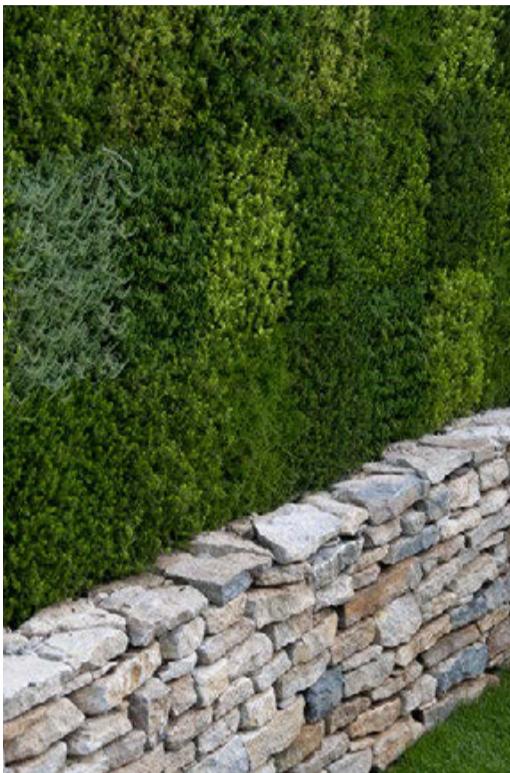


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GARDENING

This green wall features a chequerboard pattern of succulents; in order to continue looking as good as this, green walls need to be properly constructed with inbuilt watering systems



Recycled oil drums and other redundant materials, including scaffold poles and boards, can be used to create an unusual wall; intricate laser-cut designs allow views through some of the drums



Old bed springs usually fill gaps in farmers' fences, but here they are transformed into a novel and attractive garden screen with euphorbias and alliums growing in the foreground



BEAUTIFUL BOUNDARIES

Whether your walls, fences and hedges mark the official line between your property and that of your neighbours or simply divide one part of the garden from another, they can affect the mood of the space they contain: a solid boundary, such as a wall or a close-boarded wooden fence, encloses and protects, while those with a greater degree of openness, including picket fences or iron railings, borrow the exterior view.



Local stone is the ideal choice for a garden wall, as it blends harmoniously with its surroundings; here, one built of slate supports an espaliered apple and contrasts with the bright planting below



A hedge needn't be on a single plane – this stepped-box version is backed dramatically by taller-growing yew; for this to work, though, it needs to be cut with a great eye for straight lines



An unusual green wall uses rough-hewn stones arranged vertically rather than horizontally to give the impression of a cliff face that has been naturally colonised by plants



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OUT & ABOUT

Harveys Garden Plants at Thurston, near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, specialises in many woodland and shade-loving varieties. The nursery is particularly famous for its huge range of hellebores, including the Bradfield hybrids (left), which they have bred themselves. Owner Roger Harvey recommends buying hellebores in flower so you know just what you are getting. Head there for the Hellebores in the Winter Garden event on 13 and 14 February and receive 25% off the hellebore collection and 20% off other plants. Visit between Wednesday and Sunday to enjoy the great café (harveysgardenplants.co.uk).



KEEP CONTROL

Weeds seriously reduce the crop in the vegetable garden, so anything that cuts down on them in an environmentally friendly way is good news. The Grow Grid is a weed-control membrane sheet with holes, available in four patterns to suit various vegetables, plants and cut flowers. With biodegradable stakes to secure it to the ground, it will last for five seasons in total; £12.95 for a small pack (1.5m x 2m) or £19.95 for large (1.5m x 4m) from quickcrop.co.uk.

garden notes



Everything you need to know to get the most from your plot in February

WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON

thanks to a thermostatically controlled propagation mat. Although the equipment uses a bit more energy in the early months of the year, more efficient seed germination actually saves resources and I no longer need to sow two or three batches. I was inspired to take action by visits to Loseley Park last year where we were photographing the garden through the growing season in preparation for our new series that begins next month. The Loseley gardeners use heated matting in the greenhouse and I was very envious of their seedlings, which were coming up like mustard and cress. See what I'm currently growing at theenduringgardener.com or enjoy a bit of vicarious garden visiting with Veronica Peerless at throughthegardengate.co.uk/blog.



WHAT TO DO

In the greenhouse

Sow sweet peas now if you didn't do it last autumn.

Make early sowings of salads in gutters or cells for planting out next month.

Pot on autumn-sown seedlings.

In the garden

Hard-prune colourful salix and cornus stems (below left) to ensure a good display next year. Plant lily bulbs outdoors in dry weather or indoors in pots to keep lily beetle at bay.

On the allotment

Make your first direct sowing of peas and broad beans in good weather.

Lime acid soil in preparation for planting brassicas in April or May. Dig in overwintered green manure. ↗

THIS MONTH

While my dilapidated garage was being replaced last autumn, I took the opportunity to have power and light run to my nearby greenhouse. Over the years, I've managed without both, but it has been a bit of a juggling act involving much germinating of seeds on the kitchen windowsill followed by moving the seedlings to the greenhouse when I judged they would survive its chilly interior. Now my heated propagator is working its magic in the greenhouse rather than indoors, and seedlings graduate to the bench, which is kept frost-free

BUY WISELY *Rose arches*

BUDGET Fenland's plain rose arch is made from solid iron rods and comes in three sizes. The 1.2m wide x 43cm deep design can be easily assembled and is available black-primed (£95.75) or galvanised (£123.25), plus delivery (fenlandironworks.co.uk).

AFFORDABLE Made from black powder-coated square steel, the 1.5m wide x 1.05m deep Roman garden arch from Harrod Horticulture (£285) is also available with floor-fixing pins and plates (harrodhorticultural.com).

INVESTMENT Garden Requisites' lattice wirework arches, made from rust-resistant galvanised steel, are available in many sizes and designs. The medium Roman arch measures 1.52cm x 46cm and costs from £350 (garden-requisites.com).



Tip: check the viability of old seeds between sheets of damp paper towel – discard those with lower than 50% germination

Rhubarb, rhubarb

You can use an upturned bucket or small bin to encourage this early fruit, but a terracotta forcing is a more attractive addition to the garden. The porous nature of the clay also means there is no build-up of damp, which can damage young shoots. When not being used for its intended purpose, it looks lovely among grasses in the border or, with its lid upturned, as a summer home for trailing plants. Buy for £85 from The Potting Shed in Hexham, Northumberland, online at thepottingshed.co.uk for £89.95 (incl. delivery) or check the website to find a stockist.



EVENT Visit one of the 27 snowdrop gardens open in aid of the NGS in February (ngs.org.uk).

A glorious gift

The Garden Anthology (Frances Lincoln, £16.99) is a great Valentine's Day present for keen horticulturalists. It draws on 100 years of *The Garden* magazine, covering topics as diverse as 'Reinventing the Dahlia' and 'Why Welcome Wasps' to 'Does Planting by the Moon Work?' alongside a few rather alarming historic extracts, including 'Nicotine: Its Use and Value in Horticulture' from 1902. There's also plenty of lively writing from the current crop



of contributors, as well as beautiful illustrations by Jenny Bowers. To order for the special price of £13.59 (with free UK p&p), call 01903 828503 or email mailorders@lbsltd.co.uk, quoting offer code APG222 with your name and address.

PICK OF THE SHRUBS

Chimonanthus praecox - Wintersweet



WHY? The common name says it all – although the small sulphur-yellow flowers that open along the shrub's bare branches are modestly attractive, it's the spicy fragrance they exude that makes it a must-have for the winter garden.

WHERE? In a sunny, sheltered position in fertile well-drained soil – preferably against a wall and close to the house, so you can appreciate the scent.

BEWARE Patience is required, as it can take a few years before it blooms. Like many winter-flowering plants, it looks quite dull in leaf, so position it where it can retire into the background during summer.

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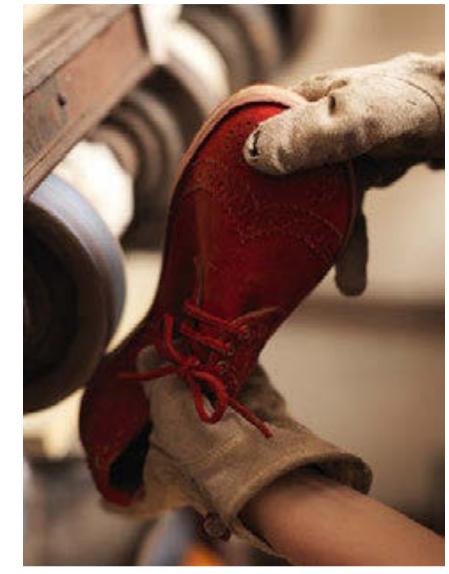
CRAFT

HEART & SOLE

In her workshop in the Welsh countryside, Ruth Davey crafts beautiful, unique shoes that are guaranteed to put a spring in your step

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT





inding the perfect footwear for a special occasion can entail fruitless hours trailing round shoe shops, but few of us would resort to making our own boots from an old sheepskin coat and a pair of trainers. This is what Ruth Davey did as a fashion-conscious teenager when she couldn't find what she wanted and, unwittingly, set out on a path to become a bespoke shoemaker.

Her enterprising feat may have had something to do with the lack of shops in rural mid-Wales in the 1990s and an unconventional childhood. Her 'back garden' was the Hafod Estate, 500 acres of woodland, gorges and waterfalls near Aberystwyth, where she and her sister and three brothers could run barefoot until darkness fell. Home-educated by their mother and aunt, who brought in tutors from all over the country to teach in the caravan that served as a classroom, theirs was a carefree upbringing. "For three days a week we were taught the core subjects; for the other two, we learned a range of topics from pottery and dance to woodwork and plumbing."

Ruth is also influenced by alternative therapies and takes a holistic approach to her craft. She believes that "shoes should support our whole body by being as close as possible to bare feet, firmly rooted to the ground. My lasts (foot-shaped models) are broad enough to let toes stretch, move and flex, yet are closely fitting around the arch. The proper foot position leads to good posture, healthy walking and a sense of wellbeing." As a trained reflexologist, she has learned how a variety of painful

"I have orders from nurses and teachers, who spend all day on their feet and long for comfort"

conditions can be treated by massaging specific reflex points on the feet, encouraging the body to restore its natural balance. So it's fitting that Ruth, 28, has based her business on the outskirts of Machynlleth, an ancient market town in Powys that has long attracted those in search of an eco-lifestyle, and is home to the Centre for Alternative Technology.

Her workshop is up a rough, single track in the hills, where she lives with her partner Naphtali, a carpenter, in a rented 18th-century farmhouse. A gaggle of geese regularly parades past the window and soon the surrounding fields will be dotted with spring lambs. It is in this tranquil setting that she makes her boots, shoes and sandals using the softest British leather, tanned in a kaleidoscope of colours, from elegant browns to bright pinks.

In keeping with the slower pace of life in the countryside, "shoemaking cannot be fast-forwarded," she says. It takes three weeks or more to craft a pair of brogues, for example, because the method involves intricately piecing together leathers, adding decorative perforations and serrated edges. By working on two styles at a time, she can produce around a hundred pairs per year, which provides her with a manageable income.

Each order is tailored exactly to the individual's measurements, sent by the customer through the post or via Ruth's website, after receiving a template and full instructions. From this information she makes a cardboard pattern, then cuts out ten pieces to form the upper of the shoe.

She has two sewing machines, which are used at different stages of the process, and an array of traditional tools - awls, eyelet punches, hammers, scissors - that have been donated, found at agricultural



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wren
KITCHENS



THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS PAGE In her workshop, Ruth uses each piece of fabric and leather to the full and keeps tiny scraps for other projects,

including the laces. She uses traditional techniques and tools to handcraft her shoes, which are made to measure following a fitting conducted by post

shows or specially made for her. Using a skiver to reduce the thickness of the pieces of cut leather, she then rolls and hammers the edges down. A lining in leather or suede is added and the pieces sewn together, after which the upper and sole are joined. The next stage is stretching and working the leather over the last, which can take days to get exactly right. An extra rubber tyre-tread sole is added for flexibility and grip, and can be replaced when worn out. The customer has one (postal) fitting, after which final adjustments are made. As another order nears completion, her tabby cat Cotcher looks on, darting out her paw occasionally to try to catch the handmade leather shoelaces that are the finishing touch. Then the shoes are posted off to their new owner. The process enables clients as far away as Alaska to find the perfect shoe without setting foot outside the house.

Ruth's interest in naturopathy was nurtured by her mentor Alan James Raddon, with whom she served a five-year apprenticeship until 2010, and whose designs she still makes under licence, in addition to her own. "Alan was 60 at the time, and wanted to pass on his techniques so the craft wouldn't disappear," she says. "He took a risk on me at 18." Her first shoes under his tutelage were plain, brown, unlined, and took two weeks to make. Now she can't imagine any other way of life, and credits her teacher with the skills she has honed and made her own. These were recognised with a Balvenie Young Master of Craft award in 2011 and then, as part of an annual business competition, the prize of a year rent-free in a workshop designed by world-famous designer Thomas Heatherwick in Aberystwyth. In 2014 she won a Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust grant, which has enabled her to enrol on a boot design course at London College of Fashion and to research traditional weaving, inspired by her love of Welsh and Scottish tweed. She enjoys incorporating fabric into her designs, experimenting with how different textures work together.

A pair of Ruth's shoes will last for many years, even if worn every day, and can then be sent back for repair. "I have a massive cupboard full of everyone's measurements going back years," she says. Although the prices, from £345, may seem steep, they are not only for the well-heeled. "I have orders from pregnant women, young mums, nurses, doctors and teachers," she says. "Many spend all day on their feet and long for comfort." One testimonial on her website reads, "I worked out that they have given me four years of foot bliss for 18p per day." Another customer says, "I find I can walk much further and faster



in them and I have less back and hip pain than ever before." For Ruth, such feedback is extremely motivating.

Out of respect for the material she uses, and the animal from which it derived, every piece of leather is used to the full. She has salvaged off-cuts from skips and crammed them into cupboard drawers already so full that she has had to expand into an adjoining outbuilding. Extra space is needed not just for her work but for her new baby Talitiu, who was born in October. Naturally, beautifully crafted booties have now joined Ruth's growing collection, so a new generation will be appreciating her desirable designs for years to come. 

SPECIAL CL READER OFFER Ruth Davey is offering a ten per cent discount on any order placed by 28 February 2015; view the range at ruthemilydavey.co.uk and to place an order, call 01650 511868 or 07890 602840 and quote 'CL Reader Offer'.

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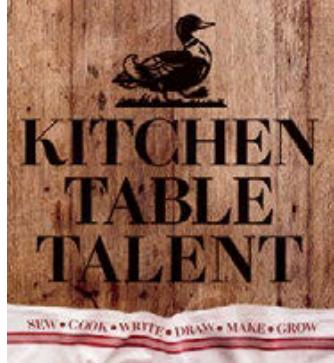
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Let your TALENT SHINE

In our new series celebrating home-grown skills, we profile women who are making the most of their hobby, whether that's earning a little money from their kitchen table or giving up the day job and launching a fully fledged business. This month, meet Julie Dodsworth, our new Talent Ambassador and columnist, as she talks about taking the plunge at the age of 50 and using her flair for design to create a flourishing brand

INTERVIEW BY LOUISE ELLIOTT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER

Did you always know you had a creative talent? When I was growing up, I loved painting and making things. I wanted to study art but I left school at 16 to become an apprentice florist, which satisfied some of my creative urges and passion for colour. In 2007, when my husband Simon and I bought our narrowboat, I rediscovered my love of painting and began decorating the inside with traditional canal boat motifs – tables, chairs, cupboards, watering cans, boxes, china and garden tools were all gradually covered with daisies, roses and leaves. I taught myself how to do everything from scratch – I've never been to an art class – and I developed my own vintage, folky style. Softening the usual palette of vibrant colours helped the designs to feel more contemporary. Friends and neighbours on other boats were soon asking me to produce similar pieces for them.

What were you doing before? For the past 25 years, Simon and I have run a plant and flower business for hotels. As this grew, we needed a base in the south, so that we didn't have to face a four-hour drive back to our home in York after a long day's work. We had always loved holidays on the canals, so a narrowboat was the perfect solution.

What gave you the idea to turn your talent into a business? Initially, I thought that I might sell a range of painted craft items locally but I knew this would be very labour-intensive and time-consuming, as the plant business would still be running alongside. In 2010, my daughter Bethany suggested that the patterns I created

would work well on homeware and other accessories, and the seed of an idea was sown. We visited a local garden centre to look at products and I discovered that many well-known brands are a collaboration between the best designers and larger manufacturers. I began to realise that I could make a living from 'licensing' my designs, and that this would carry less risk than selling direct. I was just coming up to 50, and Bethany and my son Joe had left home, so I thought why not? I knew it was a chance to use my talents and I had to find out if I could make it happen. I never felt that I was too old to give it a go.

What were your first steps? Licensing is a less usual route to market, and I had no experience or guidance. The early days were tough but I had a belief, the encouragement of my family and a clear vision. Most of all, I think it was just sheer perseverance that brought my dream to life. The driving force was visualising a British-made product on the high street bearing my design – and my name. I had to learn everything along the way and acquire many new skills – product design, finance, marketing and social media. First, I researched which companies were behind those brand names and which were the best in British production. Next I set myself the challenge of cold calling a certain number of manufacturers every day to see if they would collaborate with me. Initially, I was always apologising for my lack of training and experience, and that I wasn't a 'name'. Then I understood that it's my ordinary story that is so extraordinary, so I emphasised that. After around a year, I had a 

JULIE DODSWORTH

From her traditional narrowboat moored on a stretch of the Grand Union in Northamptonshire,

Julie Dodsworth creates a range of designs inspired by 18th-century canal folk art. She set up her licensing business three years ago and her distinctive floral patterns now appear on a range of homeware, stationery, ceramics and fashion items, including collaborations with Barbour, Wax Lyrical, Dartington Crystal and Churchill China. Her collections sell in more than 2,000 stores in 20 countries.





I taught myself how to do everything – I've never been to an art class – and I developed my own vintage, folky style

lucky break with McCaw Allan, an Irish textile company, and launched the Julie Dodsworth brand in the spring of 2011.

How did you grow the business? In my first year I worked hard at getting into all the cornerstones of homeware – china, candles, glass, fabrics – and I began working with Churchill China and Wax Lyrical. More collaborations followed in my second year and I started branching out into other areas, including fashion and gifts. I now work with 25 British and European manufacturers, all experts in their field, which is a great learning experience. The brands I targeted, such as Dartington Crystal and Barbour, have a clear and proven presence on the high street, which helped to introduce my work to a wide market.

How does a design take shape? Using traditional canal paints, I decorate milk churns, small chairs, cupboards and plates on the narrowboat. The shape of the piece will influence the flow, scale and style of the motifs I create. The paints are quite strong, so I have to work outside in all weathers, but I'm surrounded by inspiration – the beautiful boats chugging past and the wild flowers that bloom along the towpath. I draw ideas for the colours from the changing seasons and the heritage hues of

the waterways. I use just three core shades – gold, red and blue – then add touches of black and white to produce variations.

When I'm happy with the design, I re-create it as a piece of flat artwork that can be scanned and sent digitally to the design team at the factories. This will be used to create a prototype, which I will colour-check and tweak. The range is then taken to trade shows all over the world. The whole process takes around 18 months. Seeing my products for sale in shops such as Harrods, Selfridges and Barbour is incredibly rewarding. I don't like to stand still, though, and I'm continuing to develop new ideas such as bath products.

Any advice for budding entrepreneurs? Design something that you would like to buy yourself, so that you always believe in your product and feel proud of it. Stay focused on your aims and achievements, and don't compare yourself to others. Set yourself goals within a reasonable timescale and always keep to your budget. Stay positive for when the going gets tough. Above all, be proactive and persevere. It worked for me. 

To view Julie's collections, go to juliedodsworth.com. Don't miss Julie's column, starting next month, which will be a regular part of this new small-business series.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY NATHAN WELTON

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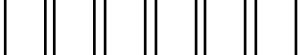
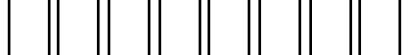
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Is it time to build on the green belt?

With the need for more housing, the protected areas of land around many of our towns and cities are under increasing scrutiny

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH

England's green belts celebrate their 60th anniversary this year just as debate about their future gathers pace among planners, developers and campaign groups. Government projections estimate the UK will need six million new homes in the next 30 years – but where can they be built? While some voices outside Westminster are in favour of building on green belt land, the notion appears to be the taboo no politician dare speak of – especially in the run-up to the general election. Green belt was first introduced in London and Sheffield in 1938 and it was rolled out to the rest of England in 1955. The Government urged local councils to ring-fence areas of land around towns with the aim of preventing urban sprawl, stopping neighbouring towns merging into each other and protecting the countryside from encroachment. Forty years later, objectives were added to provide recreation and spaces for nature, to improve derelict patches, and to retain farming and forestry.

It's perhaps not surprising that green belts have strong support among the population as a whole. In a survey conducted by Natural England and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), 73 per cent of respondents said they valued them as places to enjoy recreation, such as walking or cycling. These swathes of protected land encircle 14 of England's towns and cities, and, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government, cover around one-and-a-half million hectares (around 13 per cent of the country). Wales has one green belt, between Cardiff and Newport, while Scotland has ten.

Few would call for the complete demise of these green spaces, but many are arguing that sometimes the belt needs to be loosened a notch. "They have done a very good job in preventing towns and cities from sprawling, yet there are many places where the pressures for growth are just too great to be accommodated through urban infilling," says David Rudlin, who last year won the prestigious Wolfson Economics Prize for his designs of garden-city-style extensions to towns, which would take a bite out of green

belt. "Some argue that these places should grow no further. However, this has consequences; it makes housing unaffordable, discourages employers, and causes growth to leapfrog the green belt to surrounding towns often without good public transport. We should be allowing a small part of the green belts to flex by permitting development in controlled circumstances."

There is a public misconception, say campaigners, that all the protected swathes of land are beautiful countryside. According to Natural England, seven per cent of it already features development, while around a quarter is not registered for agricultural use or classed as woodland. Why not, they say, build much-needed housing on these scrappy pieces with low environmental, farming or aesthetic quality?

But its champions claim that, as well as maintaining the character, community and identity of towns and cities, such as Bath and St Albans, green belt also allows urban dwellers to reach countryside easily. Those with gardens, parks or countryside close to home, particularly children, are less likely to suffer from obesity and related health issues, according to a study by the University of Bristol and the University of East Anglia.

Importantly, the current policy of protection also encourages harder-to-develop brownfield sites in urban areas to be regenerated. Architect and Labour peer Richard Rogers claims opening up green belt land is "pandering" to the needs of house builders who find it easier and cheaper to build homes in open areas – and that we should continue to prioritise the estimated 30,000 hectares of brownfield land in England first. Successive governments have pledged to protect it, with the latest guidance from Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles and Housing and Planning Minister Brandon Lewis stating that "green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional cases". The passing of this political hot potato, it seems, looks likely to continue.

THIS PAGE Green belt land in the Chilterns **OPPOSITE** A new housing development near Middlesbrough; **Box Hill, Surrey**



Ed Clarke, author of *Delivering Change – Building Homes Where We Need Them* for Centre for Cities (centreforcities.org)



Paul Miner, planning campaign manager for Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

YES

WE SHOULD BUILD ON THE GREEN BELT

“Developing just five per cent of the green belt could deliver the new homes that are so greatly needed”

MANY OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL CITIES are also the least affordable – including London, Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol – and property is a huge issue. It's generally agreed we need to construct at least 200,000 new homes each year, but while all the political parties are playing the numbers game with housing, no one is saying where we're going to put them. Building on this protected land is hugely political as green belt is such a popular policy. It has been very successful, but many people wrongly conflate the idea with rolling fields. In reality, quite a lot of it consists of things like quarries, breakers' yards and scrubland. A significant amount is already developed.

We should look at green belt strategically. There are poor-quality areas near existing development and infrastructure. No one is saying, 'Let's build on Box Hill' in Surrey – but creating homes on some of the scrappy parts around Redhill station makes sense. Even just looking at the ten least affordable cities, for example, within a 25-minute walk of most train stations, there is the potential for 1.4 million homes in areas of green belt land that are already defined as 'built-up'. This means developing around five per cent of the total area of protected land around these cities to deliver the properties that are greatly needed, with access to existing jobs and infrastructure.

In these cities, developing brownfield areas can supply only up to 425,000 new homes. This doesn't even come close to what we require. It's also an expensive option. Many of the 'easy' sites have already been developed and what is left is often complicated or contaminated land. These costs are passed on to the house buyer. Green belt is also creating a pressure on playing fields and gardens within cities. Many places, such as Oxford, are turning theirs into new estates to cope with demand. We're protecting one piece of land at the cost of another.

It's not just a housing issue. The Confederation of British Industry and London Chamber of Commerce say that lack of property development is threatening the growth of our most successful cities. Businesses are finding it hard to hire people for entry-level jobs because they can't afford to live there or nearby. We have to be rational and strategic. Green belts are not only slivers of the country; they're of far greater acreage than urban land – London's is three times the size of the city. We need to provide additional housing, within reach of our big centres, and it has to be affordable. It's time to look at small sections of green belt.

NO

WE SHOULD PROTECT IT

“Instead of taking away from these safeguarded areas, we should be making it more attractive and more accessible”

THERE IS A MISCONCEPTION about what green belt land is for. The primary aim was, and still is, to stop towns and cities from sprawling into the countryside and into each other. And it's been very successful. Take a city like Bath – green belt policy played a huge part in it becoming a World Heritage Site. By contrast, many urban centres in North America and parts of Europe have expanded without control. Transport links are costlier, people are more dependent on cars, and land previously used for farming has been consumed. Inner cities, meanwhile, have often been left to degenerate. Green belt planning policy in the UK means that developers are encouraged to use brownfield sites to regenerate cities. A recent report from CPRE found that more than 1 million properties could be built here.

Government is at great pains to say it hasn't relaxed controls, but our concern is that local authorities are under increasing pressure to review green belt boundaries. The National Planning Policy Framework states boundaries can be changed in exceptional situations and we are seeing an increasing number of authorities, including in Surrey, making these cases. I don't think that developing green belt around London, for example, is going to make the city more affordable – there are so many additional factors involved. What we need to do is ensure there is plenty of lower-cost housing in new developments. The role played by local authorities should be greater, and social providers should be allowed to invest more in housing. The condition of green belt land is a secondary factor. It's true that 18 per cent is classed as neglected, but if you make the condition a factor, it could encourage owners to run down these spaces in order to gain permission to build on them. Instead, what we should have is an incentive to regenerate the poorer-quality areas. Colne Valley, around Heathrow, for example, turned disused gravel pits into a regional park.

Recently, some critics have claimed that intensive arable farmland is not a valuable environment and should be considered for housing. At a time when food costs are rising and we produce less than two-thirds of our food, it's madness to suggest we lose even more agricultural acreage. Green belt is a hugely successful planning policy and with good reason. Instead of taking away from it, we should be making it more attractive and accessible, providing an invaluable breathing space for town and city dwellers that can supply them with good, local food.



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WORDS BY RACHAEL OAKDEN

No. 6 *Producing food*

Nothing tastes as good as freshly picked fruit and vegetables. And with increasing concerns about pesticides, food miles and the ever-inflating cost of the weekly shop, many people dream of growing their own. But few of us have enough land, time or skills to devote to such an enterprise, which is why group schemes are gaining popularity. They offer the chance to cultivate and share affordable produce for a fraction of the time commitment required by individual plots.

How do group schemes work?

There are many different forms of communal food enterprise. The model known as community-supported agriculture (CSA), which grew out of the organic movement, involves a partnership between a farmer or grower (or a baker or fisherman) and a group of people who commit to buying a share of their produce. The idea is to spread the risks and rewards of food production. Another option is to get together to rent land and pay someone to cultivate it, while a more informal and hands-on approach is a team of local volunteers planting and harvesting such a patch themselves.

Where can we grow?

Acquiring a plot is the biggest challenge for new groups. Unless a parcel of



THIS PAGE Communal food schemes offer the chance to cultivate and share affordable fresh produce for a fairly low investment of time

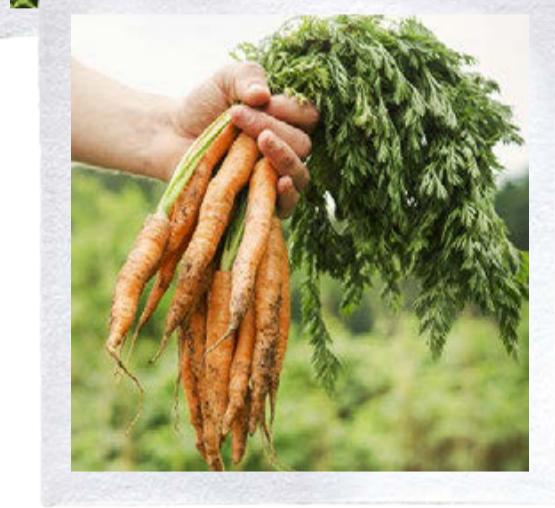
community- or parish-owned land becomes available, the best option is to rent a small piece from a farmer, landowner or local authority. One acre may be all you need to cultivate enough produce for everyone who wants to buy. Find out if there are any organic farmers in your area: they are likely to be supportive of innovative schemes that promote sustainable local food production. The Community Land Advisory Service helps groups to find plots for growing and to form agreements with those they belong to (communitylandadvice.org.uk).

How do we get started?

Before approaching landowners, take the time to gauge and canvas support from the whole village by holding meetings, conducting surveys and using social media – consider setting up a Facebook group, for example. The more community interest you can prove, the stronger your case. Make the most of what your village has to offer and let people know that it's not all about digging and weeding; some residents may be able to give gardening advice, design posters and websites, arrange fundraising events or deliver vegetable boxes.

How do we pay for it?

Successful community food projects are financially sustainable in the long



THIS PAGE Food enterprises give communities a sense of purpose and ownership – and one acre may provide all the crops that the group needs

term, with produce sales covering the day-to-day running costs. Grants for start-up and capital expenses, such as buildings and fencing, may be available from several different sources, including the Lottery-funded Awards for All (awardsforall.org.uk), Landfill Communities Fund (entrust.org.uk) and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's Food Strand (esmefairbairn.org.uk).

What about crowdfunding?

Crowdfunding websites, such as buzzbnk.org or crowdfunder.co.uk, are an increasingly popular way for community groups and social enterprises to raise money: online supporters pledge set amounts in return for rewards, such as free veg boxes or farm walks. However, reaching your target in a fixed time frame



requires a lot of time, energy and networking prowess – if you fail, you don't get the money. Only attempt it if you have an experienced and active user of social media on your team.

Where can we go for help and advice?

Visit some of the many successful schemes that are already operating across the UK. The CSA Network runs training events and can put you in touch with groups in your area. Its new website is an invaluable source of case studies, advice and tools, including the downloadable manual *A Share in the Harvest*, a comprehensive guide to planning, structuring and running a community food enterprise (communitysupportedagriculture.co.uk). 

BE INSPIRED BY...

The Field, Dunkeld and Birnam, Perthshire

The south-facing piece of land that sits above the River Tay is more than a place to grow vegetables. As the home of Dunkeld and Birnam Community Growing, a charitable trust known as The Field, it also provides education, exercise and social interaction.

"The nearest supermarket is 12 miles away, so people value the chance to buy local produce," says founder Dave Roberts. "Our members range from young children to pensioners. For retired, bereaved or ill people, coming here gives them a sense of purpose and fulfilment."

The group, established in 2010, leases three acres from the Soil Association Land Trust, of which a third is planted with potatoes, leeks, carrots, onions, beans, courgettes, salad crops and herbs. These are sold at market stalls in Birnam and Dunkeld, two villages joined by a bridge over the River Tay, from June to October (winter crops are sold all year at the field gate). While grants of nearly £25,000 from the local wind farm, community council and People's Postcode Lottery paid for fencing, sheds and a polytunnel, the trust is now self-sustaining thanks to sales, membership fees and the volunteers. Vintage tractor collectors do the ploughing and potato harvest, and others plant or help with fundraising and publicity.

Villagers even propagate trays of seed at home. "It gives everyone a sense of ownership,"

Dave says. "And once you realise how much work goes into growing food, you really appreciate its worth." (dunkeldfield.co.uk)

THREE MORE PROJECTS TO LEARN FROM

Caerhys Organic Community Agriculture (coca-csa.org) members pay a subscription in return for a share in the harvest of an organic farm near St Davids, Pembrokeshire, in this volunteer-run scheme.

Chagfood (chagfood.org.uk; chagfarm.org) is a community-supported market garden on the edge of Dartmoor, which works closely with a community-supported goat dairy and free-range pig farm.

Five a Day Market Garden (fiveaday.org.uk) supplies seasonal produce to its local supporters, who may also volunteer and attend educational workshops at its two-acre plot in the village of Englefield in Berkshire.

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THIS PAGE Striking handmade lampshades and an eclectic mix of country chairs bring relaxed character to the dining area

OPPOSITE Plump cushions and soft throws add to the appeal of seating arranged invitingly around a woodburner in the new extension

ROOM WITH A VIEW



Country charm meets industrial chic in a family home of two distinct halves in Kent, where a bold contemporary extension has given a neglected centuries-old farmhouse an exciting new lease of life

WORDS BY SUE GILKES • STYLING BY BEN KENDRICK • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WHITING



THIS PAGE Cool grey panelling and pale, grained plywood units soften harder elements, such as concrete and marble, in the kitchen

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP LEFT Factory-style metal windows make the most of the view; the extension is clad with oak boards; a stylish wet room off the hall mixes metro and encaustic tiles





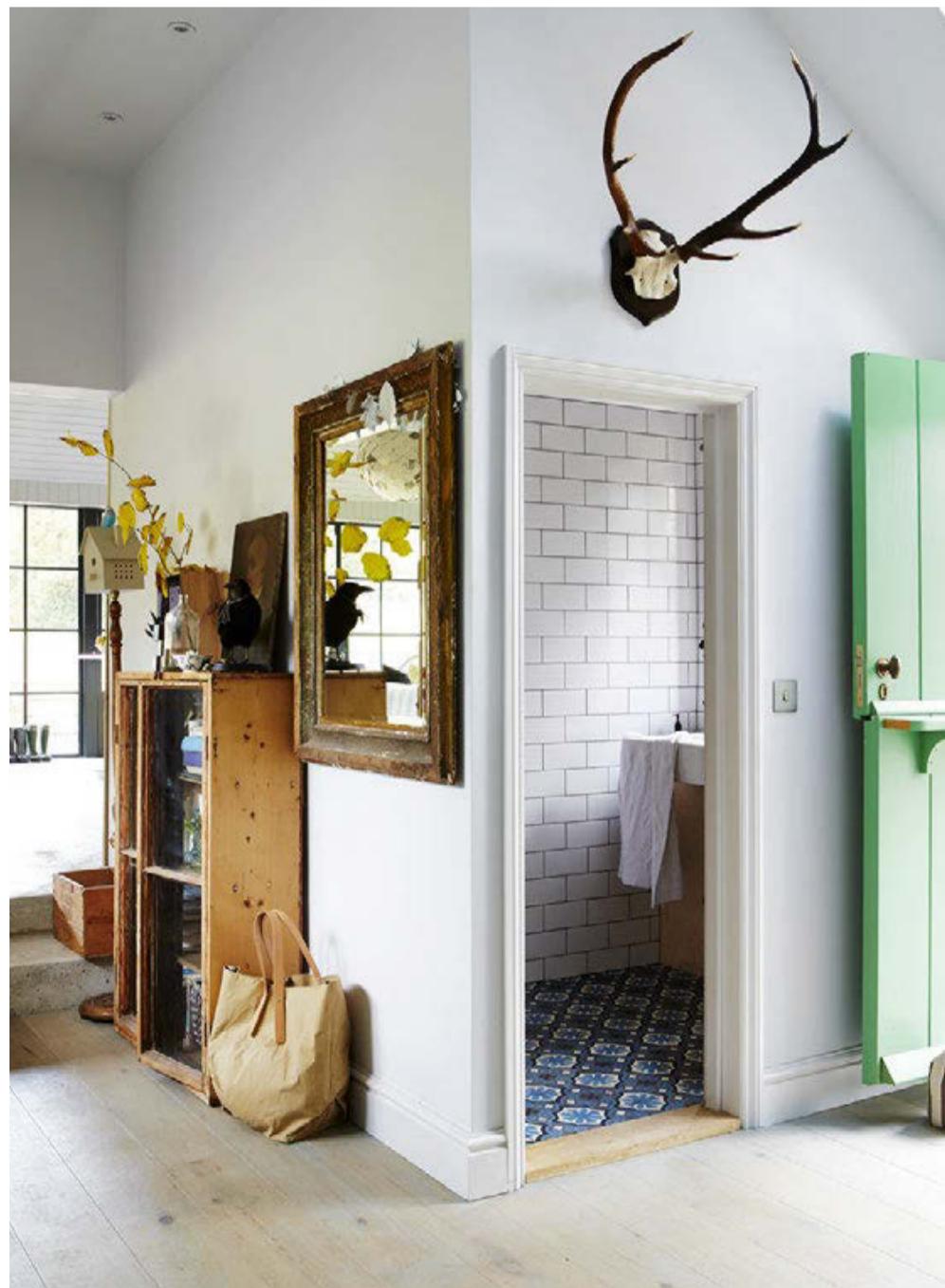
A

lthough a rose-tinted dream for many, the reality of taking on a rundown property is not for the faint-hearted. But when Helen Brathy and her partner came across an old Kentish farmhouse near Cranbrook with assorted outbuildings, including two ancient wooden barns – all in varying states of dilapidation – they didn't hesitate.

Having already renovated a cottage near Tunbridge Wells when they moved out of London ten years earlier, they were now in search of a more rural location with plenty of space for their two young boys to run around. “And I was ready for another project,” Helen admits. Backing onto open fields, edged with tall, mature trees, the traditional tile-hung brick property had the country setting they wanted and certainly presented the challenge she was looking for: “A family had been living there for over 50 years and it was in desperate need of attention,” she explains.

Before moving in, almost three years ago, the family rented nearby for a month in order to blitz the bedrooms and, once installed in the house, they set about replacing everything from roof tiles to walls: “You could put your hand through some of the internal ones where the lathe and plaster had crumbled, and when we took the wallpaper off the ceiling in the main bedroom, it came crashing down,” Helen recalls.

Originally a two-up, two-down dating back to the 1650s, the house was added onto in Georgian times, including the low-ceilinged kitchen and pantry at the side. The family used this tiny room – with its ancient Aga, butler’s sink and no surfaces other than a small old Formica-topped table – for two years. Their plan had always been to extend it out into the garden until a friend suggested the more ➤



radical and exciting idea of converting an old outbuilding at the rear into an altogether much larger kitchen/living space.

Working closely with the local planning department, the couple came up with a sympathetic industrial-influenced design that referenced its previous incarnation as a workshop. Its exterior is clad in oak boards, with a corrugated aluminium roof inspired by farm buildings in the area. Eight glazed factory-style metal doors run along the length of the back wall, maximising the view of fields and trees. With matching windows on the three other sides and a lofty ceiling that follows the line of the rafters, this vast double-height room feels wonderfully light and spacious.

The deliberately plain and functional aesthetic is lifted with bold bursts of colour. A large red Smeg Architect fridge stands in one corner, while a contemporary take on a Formica-topped table – a long rectangle of plywood with an eye-catching yellow surface resting on wooden trestles – is positioned near the full-length windows, surrounded by an eclectic assortment of mismatched country chairs: old and new, painted and bare.

Over in the far corner, a contemporary L-shaped grey sofa and comfortable old armchair are drawn up invitingly in front of a woodburning stove. This snug spot, liberally scattered with cushions, vintage Welsh blankets and the odd sheepskin throw, is where the family loves to watch films along with Tiger, their wheaten terrier. Since the first official meal in the new kitchen/extension – “a big family lunch last Easter when there wasn’t even a proper roof” – they’ve pretty much lived in the space. “We barely venture into the rest of the house except to sleep,” Helen admits.

Underfloor heating, laid below the utilitarian concrete floor, keeps the room at a perfect temperature and continues into the old part of the house – sympathetically linked to the extension via a vernacular-style hall – although here it is concealed beneath oak boards treated with a mix of Swedish Osmo oil blended with a little greyish-blue paint. Their warm tones work well in the low-ceilinged sitting room, with its traditional inglenook fireplace, exposed beams and leaded-light windows. “We’ve used ➤



Quirky collections of fascinating finds link the old and new areas of the house



THIS PAGE Eclectic still-life displays, combining vintage pieces with natural elements, bring detail and interest to every available surface

OPPOSITE Warmer hues have been used to cosy effect in the snug sitting room in the original part of the house, with its informal mix of rustic furniture, including armchairs upholstered with cheery plaid blankets





0 T & M E



darker colours in here to make the room feel more cosy," Helen explains. "I mixed the dirty khaki for the fireplace by adding blackboard paint to various tins of green we had lying around – we had to be creative as we were on a budget."

The blackboard paint was left over from Helen's office, where it was used to disguise a wall of cupboards – now a striking collage of scribbled notes, to-do lists and inspirational pictures. An art director and designer, Helen's thrifty ingenuity is most evident in the lighting department – from the distinctive shades she has covered with eye-catching fabrics, including favourite vintage Sanderson florals, to the striking glass lampbases that she makes from large jars and bottles sourced at flea markets. These are dotted about the house, providing a welcoming glow. A fine example sheds light on the crooked landing upstairs, with its sloping wooden floor and narrow doors at either end, behind which stairs wind up to the boys' attic den. In the main bedroom, beautifully soft linen bedding in muted shades from The Linen Press offsets the zingy lime yellow above the picture rail, which enhances the low light from the small leaded windows. During the initial stage of renovation, the couple had quickly transformed the four bedrooms, painting the walls with a Dulux off-white and installing old cast-iron radiators. The bathroom required a more thorough overhaul, however: elegant vintage-style fittings were sourced to complement a roll-top bath snapped up on ebay, with a basin resting on an old customised chest of drawers and antique mirror adding to the romantic rustic feel.

The wet room downstairs, on the other hand, juxtaposes Victorian-style encaustic floor tiles in a swirling blue and grey pattern with crisp white metro wall tiles, echoing the successful mix of old and new in this house of two very distinct halves. The striking contrast has created a highly original and enviably different family home. "Each part has its own appeal," Helen enthuses, "and we get to enjoy the best of both worlds." 

i The house is available as a shoot location: contact Helen on 01580 755700 or email helen@helenbratby.co.uk.

OPPOSITE In the main bedroom, a bold burst of bright yellow paint lifts an otherwise restful neutral scheme
THIS PAGE, TOP An eye-catching map and chair create a fun look in the boys' room
RIGHT A customised antique chest of drawers makes an original stand for a basin in the bathroom
FAR RIGHT The vintage cast-iron bath was an ebay find



Colourful accessories are used throughout to playful effect



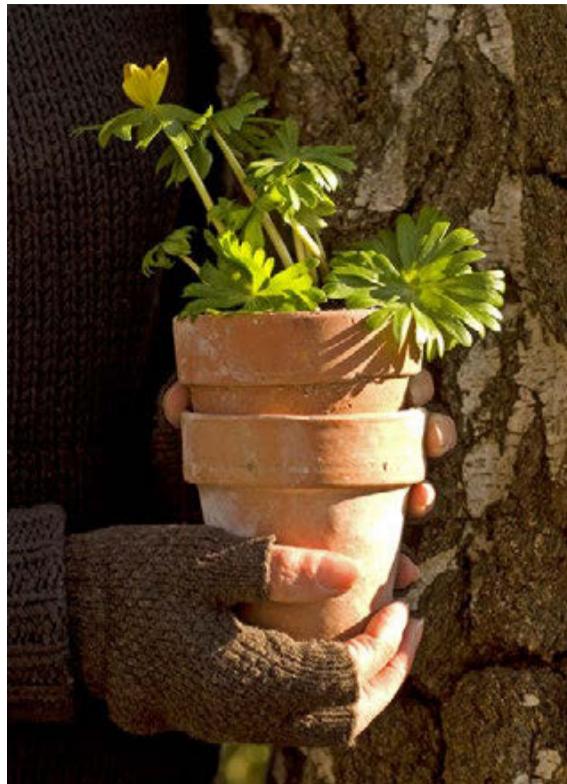
GOLDEN *wonders*



Among the first plants of the year to flower, aconites provide a welcome burst of brilliant uplifting colour

WORDS BY JACKY HOBBS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE GARRETT

THIS PICTURE Winter aconites are members of the *Ranunculaceae* family and have buttercup-like blooms 2-3cm across



**ABOVE, CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT**

Potted up individually, aconites are perfect for brightening up a window ledge; the large inviting flowers attract early pollinating insects; dividing plants every three years is an easy way to acquire more stock but their fine tubers must be replanted straightaway as they are harder to establish if dry; *Eranthis hyemalis* thrive in humus-rich soil, often created by the leaf litter deposited by deciduous trees above

While the winter landscape is bleak and bare, nature is working its magic below ground. One of the first and, therefore, most welcome, results are the swathes of shimmering aconites that begin to appear – crowds of golden-headed blooms illuminating wooded glades, mossy banks and grassy knolls where all else lies frozen, still and buried. Spreading beneath the absent canopy of deciduous trees and shrubs, they like to soak up any sunshine, their flowers opening in the bright light and closing with cloud cover or nightfall. Plentiful in numbers, winter aconites – members of the buttercup family *Ranunculaceae* – are, however, sparing in variety. Most commonly occurring is *Eranthis hyemalis*, which is quick to colonise and readily produces thick carpets of

yellow flowers held above a distinctive green ruff of dissected foliage. Successful garden cultivars include *Eranthis hyemalis* 'Orange Glow', a richer-coloured, early-flowering cultivar, and later-flowering (March/April) *Eranthis x tubergemii* 'Guinea Gold' and 'Glory' – scented varieties with bronze-tinged foliage. They all grow from thin tubers and offer up large, buttercup-like blooms, about 10–15cm tall, which attract early-pollinating insects. In smaller gardens, aconites make eye-catching edging.

The plants also naturalise well in lawns and grassland but are prone to rot in thicker-turfed areas. Influential Irish gardener William Robinson (1838–1935) introduced the idea of naturalistic planting and many of our country estates owe their stunning drifts of aconites to his – at the time – revolutionary philosophy of favouring informal displays of indigenous wild flowers. Colesbourne Park in Gloucestershire and





Position aconites to enjoy winter sun, with shade in spring and summer

Welford Park in Berkshire are among those with historic naturalised colonies – thick and vibrant bands of gold rim the woodland, river and lakeside banks, and skirt the statuesque deciduous trees.

Aconites flourish in fertile, humus-rich, free-draining yet water-retentive ground and will do particularly well in chalky soil. Position where they can enjoy plenty of winter sun, but with sufficient shade in spring and summer to prevent the tubers drying out – under-planting beneath deciduous shrubs and trees is ideal. Always wear gloves when handling the plant as its sap can cause skin irritation.

Established colonies can be thinned and extended by re-planting immediately after flowering or 'in the green', like snowdrops, which they partner well. Dividing plants every three years increases the spread, but ensure that the tubers are replanted immediately – whether divided or bought-in – as they're trickier to establish successfully when dry.

Growing from seed requires patience but is a good way of colonising large tracts of land very economically. Allow the seed to scatter naturally, or buy or gather seed when ripe in April and May

and sow in trays of seed compost. Place in a cold frame for two or three complete growing seasons before planting out in the final flowering position.

Gertrude Jekyll successfully grew aconite flowers under glass. She lifted clumps, dug 'just as they were beginning to hump themselves in their round-shouldered way through the ground before the snow came', then transferred them 'with a fat ball of soil' into shallow pans on the unheated glasshouse staging. Here they duly 'flowered like little suns', whetting the appetite for those soon to appear outside. You can see similarly raised pots in the alpine house at RHS Wisley. 

? *Colesbourne Park, Colesbourne, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (01242 870264; colesbournegardens.org.uk). Open for snowdrop weekends, when good displays of aconites can also be seen, from 31 January to 1 March 2015.*
Welford Park, Welford, Newbury, Berkshire (01488 608691; welfordpark.co.uk). Open 28 January to 1 March 2015, Weds-Sun only.
RHS Wisley, Woking, Surrey (0845 260 9000; rhs.org.uk). Open daily except Christmas Day.

OPPOSITE Aconites are 10-15cm tall with upright, cup-shaped blooms above a ruff of foliage

THIS PAGE They look best in naturalistic swathes

WHERE TO BUY

For plants 'in the green' delivered in early spring, after flowering, and tubers delivered by the end of September, visit crocus.co.uk, rhsplants.co.uk and naturescape.co.uk.

For seed, go to chilternseeds.co.uk.



PALE & interesting

Recycled fabrics, reclaimed wood and a neutral palette combine to create a home that mirrors the natural beauty of the surrounding Dutch countryside

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JELTJE JANMAAT, HOUSE OF PICTURES



OPPOSITE AND THIS PAGE The patina of old wooden furniture complements soft woollen and linen cushions and a selection of simple accessories in the all-white kitchen-breakfast room



When Babette and Erik Leertouwer bought a run-down property in the heart of rural Holland, they had a clear vision from the outset of what they wanted to achieve. "Our dream was a family home filled with natural beauty that reflects the surrounding landscape and woodlands," Babette explains. Built in the 1920s, the house needed a vast amount of restoration work to make it habitable, but stripping out everything left behind by the previous owner produced the perfect blank canvas for their ideas. "Pieces of second-hand furniture and handmade timber items were at the top of my wish list," Babette says. "They have a lovely weathered patina and instantly make a house feel lived-in and welcoming."

Despite incorporating older items, the decorating scheme has a fresh, contemporary feel throughout. In the sitting room, for example, the long sofa that's perfect for lounging on

was made by Erik using parts from different models found online and covered in a modern pale beige fabric, while the tiled fireplace has been replaced by a sleek, functional design sitting on top of a concrete plinth. A neutral palette of white and sand adds to this effect and provides an uplifting backdrop while increasing the sense of light and space in the rather narrow rooms. Interest and detail is brought to every room with collections of striking artworks, vintage accessories and artisan crockery, all in simple, earthy hues of grey, stone and beige to suit the natural mood.

Erik's handiwork can be seen throughout the property, such as the chunky dining table made from planks of

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Gleaming glassware sits on a 'floating' shelf; elsewhere, pieces of painted furniture and a carefully curated collection of shapely ceramics and decorative pieces – some made with remnants from the renovation – give the house a welcoming, relaxed feel

“Second-hand furniture and handmade timber items were at the top of my wish list”



scaffolding with industrial-style white metal pendant lights hanging above, a bed created from old wine pallets secured onto wheels and an eye-catching heart-shaped artwork crafted from scraps of wood left over from the renovation work. Babette has also become a dab hand with the sander and paintbrush, restoring an array of old dressers and chairs picked up on her weekly visits to the area's second-hand shops: "I can't resist buying these and bringing them back to life with a fresh coat of paint – I've got so many that I have to store a lot in the garden shed, ready for when I want to change things around inside." She's also designed some ingenious storage and display items – a 'floating' shelf suspended from lengths of rope holds collections of china and glassware in the kitchen and doesn't block out the 

THIS PAGE A pale palette provides a neutral backdrop, and is enlivened by a collection of quirky accessories such as hearts made from salvaged pipework and cards hanging from lengths of string attached to a wooden branch



“Nothing here is valuable but it all has meaning to us, which makes it precious”

light, while in baby son Luca's room she made a series of wooden wall crates to hold toys and clothes.

Babette is a freelance stylist and also runs her own sustainable fashion company, Halona, using fabric remnants to add a quirky touch to plain cotton T-shirts and sweaters; she has also recycled old materials into bed linen and blankets for the family home. Her eye for design is evident in the collaged artworks that decorate the walls – sepia-toned family photographs alongside framed wildlife prints, hearts made from pipework salvaged from the house and favourite cards attached to lengths of string twisted round a stick of wood. These are complemented by arrangements of seed heads and sprigs of berries gathered from the fields and

hedgerows and displayed in contemporary glassware. “I'm a bit of a magpie and find myself collecting all sorts of things – enamelware, vintage china, photo frames and old vases,” Babette says. “At the moment, I have a passion for matt brown china from the 60s and 70s – I love its functional look.

“Nothing here is valuable but it all has meaning to us, which makes it precious,” she continues. “I can clearly see our hard work at every turn.” Each item in the house has individual charm but, thanks to Babette's vision, everything blends seamlessly together into one carefully considered and beautiful whole. 

 To see Babette's fashion collection, visit halona.nl.



**OPPOSITE,
CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT** The
pared-back look
continues in Luca's
room. Arrangements
of seed heads are
displayed in modern
glass vases, while
heart-shaped artwork
crafted from salvaged
wood hangs in the main
bedroom **THIS PAGE**
Accessories featuring
simple checks add to
the homespun feel





SARAH RAVEN

is best known for her work as a gardener and author but she also studied medicine at the University of London and then worked as a junior doctor at Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton. Since her medical training, she has become interested in healthy eating and what it means to her cooking. Here, she focuses on exceptionally good foods that she believes should be included in our diet as much as possible – and how to eat them. Using information gathered from nutritionists, medical journals and research centres, and, based on her own discoveries, Sarah has distilled that knowledge into a collection of 12 fruits and vegetables, from kale and blood oranges to tomatoes and beetroot.

Sarah Raven's SUPERFOODS



In her new series, Sarah picks the healthiest fruit and vegetables to eat in season, with delicious dishes to make the most of their flavours and natural goodness

THIS MONTH: BLOOD ORANGES

WORDS, RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY **SARAH RAVEN** • PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JONATHAN BUCKLEY**
FOOD AND DRINK EDITOR **ALISON WALKER**





February to March is the best time to make the most of the Sicilian blood orange (tarocco, sanguinello or moro). Small fruit crammed with huge flavour and a soft texture that almost melts in the mouth, they are always juicy, a little sharp with a lot of acid, but this is balanced by their sugar content.

There is pleasure in consuming as many as you can, and for important health reasons, too. Blood oranges are super-rich in nutrients, in a different league to other citrus fruit. Like the rest, they have high levels of immune system-boosting vitamin C (one medium blood orange will provide more than 100 per cent of your daily needs), but they have other healthy strings to their bow as well. They contain a group of antioxidants called anthocyanins, the pigments responsible for giving this orange its intense 'blood' colour. Acting as a natural sunscreen for the fruits, it helps to protect them from UV light; this property is passed on to us when we eat them. Blood oranges are also a good source of fibre, with one providing 28 per cent of our daily requirement, plus calcium and thiamine.

Increasing numbers of laboratory and clinical trials are turning the blood orange into a superfood hero. One recent study found that drinking their juice with a full English breakfast reduced the harmful effect of the fat-laden fry-up. It's also been suggested that regular consumption of the fruit may affect our metabolism and help with weight loss.

You have to be quick to find these rich-looking, crimson fruits; some supermarkets have taken to calling them blush oranges, perhaps thinking we will be confused or offended by their proper name. They're delicious peeled and eaten as they are or juiced for breakfast, but with the recipes on these pages, why not turn them into a daily treat while they're plentiful?



BIRCHER MUESLI

Preparation 15 minutes

Serves 2

Packed with antioxidants, this authentic Swiss recipe is the ideal, slow-release start to the day, with enough nuts and seeds to keep hunger at bay until lunchtime. Prepare a double portion and keep half in the fridge for the next day.

**1 blood orange, squeezed
1 good handful of finely rolled oats
half an apple, grated finely, peel left on
2 tbsp almonds or hazelnuts, chopped into 2-3mm pieces
1 tbsp pumpkin seeds**

1 tbsp sunflower seeds

1 tbsp currants

2 tsp linseed oil

**1-2 tbsp quark (or crème fraîche or Greek yogurt)
blood oranges, to serve**

1 Stir the orange juice into the oats until well-mixed.

2 Stir in the finely grated apple (use a microplane if possible – the finer it is, the gentler the taste). Add the nuts, seeds, currants and linseed oil.

3 Finally, add the quark (or crème fraîche or yogurt) and stir well. Add blood orange segments, or, when in season, strawberries. ↗

COCONUT PANNA COTTA CARAMEL

*Preparation 15 minutes
Cooking 20 minutes Serves 6*

This classic pudding is lower in fat than the usual panna cotta, as it is made using yogurt and coconut milk instead of cream. Make it the day before so the caramel is absorbed overnight.

FOR THE CARAMEL

6 tbsp coconut palm sugar

FOR THE PANNA COTTA

3 sheets gelatine

400ml tin coconut milk

4 tbsp agave sugar

2 tsp vanilla extract or paste

400ml natural Greek yogurt

4 blood oranges, peeled and divided into de-pithed segments

1 Start by making the caramel.

Put the palm sugar into a saucepan with 6 tbsp water. Heat, stirring, until the sugar dissolves. Continue boiling gently on the heat until the caramel sauce is reduced by half.

2 Divide among six ramekins, put on a tray and set aside to cool. Now make the panna cotta. Soak the gelatine in cold water. Meanwhile, put the coconut milk into a pan over a low heat (scrape it all out of the tin), adding the agave sugar and vanilla extract or paste.

3 Stir until the sugar has dissolved and the mixture is gently simmering.

4 Squeeze the water out of the gelatine, add to the pan and stir until dissolved. Take off the heat and allow to cool slightly, then stir in the yogurt.

5 Ladle the mixture into the ramekins and, when cool, transfer to the fridge to set.

6 To serve, loosen the sides of each panna cotta with a small knife. Put a small plate on top of each one, turn upside down and turn out. Serve with orange segments.





SANGRIA CHICKEN

Preparation 20 minutes, plus marinating **Cooking** 1 hour **Serves** 4

A recipe inspired by Yotam Ottolenghi's roast chicken with clementines – one of my daughter Molly's favourite meals. It's all the healthier with the blood oranges included.

6 blood oranges (2 zested and juiced and 4 cut into 1cm slices)
1 lemon juice
3 tbsp dark brown sugar
4 tbsp olive oil
150ml fino sherry (or dry white wine)

1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1.3kg free-range chicken jointed into 8 pieces or equal weight of chicken thighs, bone in and skin on
1 bunch celery, sliced into 3cm diagonal pieces

2 bulbs fennel, sliced
1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves

- 1 In a bowl, mix together the orange zest and juice, lemon juice, sugar, oil, sherry and mustard. Season to taste.
- 2 Put the chicken, celery, fennel, orange slices and thyme into a roasting tray. Pour over the marinade. Mix and leave overnight in the fridge.

3 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6.

Put the chicken in the oven and cook for 1 hour, basting a few times, until the juices run clear and the skin is brown and crispy.

4 Drain off the fat from the tray and pour the cooking liquid into a pan. Reduce a little if too runny, or serve as it is. Serve with black or red rice and a green salad.

BLOOD ORANGE, LEMON AND PINK GRAPEFRUIT MARMALADE

Preparation 45 minutes Cooking 1 hour 40 minutes

Makes about 4-5 x 450g jars

A wonderful rich, tart marmalade, which you can eat on toast, or stir into a blood orange salad to give a greater depth of flavour. The darker jars are made with coconut palm sugar, with 400ml pectin (Certo - available from health food shops) as an alternative to normal sugar.

1.5kg blood oranges

2 lemons

2 pink grapefruit

1 tsp salt

about 2kg sugar with pectin

1 Drop the fruit into boiling water and scrub to de-wax the surfaces. Put them into a heavy-based stainless-steel

pan, cover with 3 litres water and add the salt. Put a lid on the pan and bring to the boil, then simmer for about 1 hour until soft, turning the fruit once halfway through.

2 Strain, reserving the liquor, and allow the fruit to cool. When cold, cut the fruit in half and scoop the flesh and

pips into a metal sieve set over a bowl. Reserve the rinds.

3 Using a metal spoon, stir and push the flesh through the sieve. Discard the membrane, pith and pips.

4 Cut the rinds into chunks, then thick or thin slivers.

5 Add the rind to the sieved pulp and weigh it. For every 450g, measure 450ml of the cooking liquor (if not enough, make up the amount with water). Mix, then weigh again and for every 450g, measure out 400g sugar.

6 Put the pulp, rind, sugar and liquor into the pan. Heat, stirring, to dissolve the sugar. Increase

the heat and bring to a rapid boil, then boil for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally.

7 Pull the pan off the heat and test for setting point - 105°C-106°C with a jam thermometer. Or put 1 tsp of the marmalade on a cold saucer, put in the fridge for a minute, then push with your finger - if it wrinkles, it has set. When ready, take the marmalade off the heat and allow to rest for 20 minutes.

8 Stir to distribute the peel evenly before pouring into dry, warm, sterilised jars. Cover with a waxed disc, seal and label when cold with the date.





BLOOD ORANGE SORBET

Preparation 15 minutes, plus freezing **Cooking** 5 minutes

Serves 6

One of the best drinks on the planet is a blood orange and Campari soda, but this is a healthier way of upping your blood orange intake, with no alcohol involved. I have used palm sugar (made from coconut palms) here, as it gives a slightly treacly flavour that sweetens the sharp juice in the sorbet.

juice of 8 blood oranges
100g palm sugar
zest and juice of 1 lemon

- 1 Put the orange juice into a saucepan over a low heat. Add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Do not heat for longer than necessary – it will spoil the flavour of the sorbet. Take off the heat and allow to cool.
- 2 Stir in the lemon zest and juice. Pour the mixture into an ice-cream machine and churn for 20–25 minutes according to the manufacturer's instructions. Turn into a plastic container and put into the freezer. If you don't have a machine, pour the mixture into a plastic container and freeze for 1 hour. Remove and fork through, mixing the frozen edge into the middle to break up the ice crystals. Repeat twice.
- 3 Before serving, allow the sorbet to soften in the fridge for 20 minutes. 

 Sarah has written a number of bestselling gardening and cookery books, and runs a range of courses from her home at Perch Hill in East Sussex. Visit sarahraven.com for more details.

SIMPLE DISHES for BUSY DAYS

In the first of a new series showcasing easy but mouthwatering recipes, Alison Walker creates a selection of warming soups that are nutritious, filling and packed with seasonal flavour

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARTIN POOLE • STYLING BY TABITHA HAWKINS • RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY ALISON WALKER





...soups

FRENCH ONION SOUP

Preparation 15 minutes **Cooking** 1 hour 15 minutes **Serves** 4

The humble but indispensable onion takes centre stage in this classic hearty soup. Take your time when cooking the onions, as this will bring out their natural sweetness, adding valuable depth of flavour.

50g butter
3 large Spanish onions,
thinly sliced
1 tsp soft brown sugar
1 tbsp plain flour
75ml brandy
900ml veal or beef stock
1 bay leaf

TO FINISH
8 small slices French
country bread
75g grated Gruyère

1 In a large pan, melt the butter, add the onions and a sprinkling of salt and cover

with a circle of crumpled baking parchment followed by the lid. Cook over a low heat for 45 minutes, checking and stirring occasionally, until the onions are meltingly tender.

2 Remove the lid and baking parchment, add the sugar and turn up the heat to medium. Cook until golden, stirring often.

3 Sprinkle over the flour and

cook for 1 minute. Gradually add the brandy, followed by the stock and the bay leaf. Simmer for 30 minutes.

4 Heat the grill. Divide the soup among four heatproof bowls. Top each bowl with two slices of bread and sprinkle over the cheese. Pop the bowls under the grill until the cheese is golden and bubbling. Serve immediately. 

SMOKED HADDOCK CHOWDER

Preparation 15 minutes

Cooking about 50 minutes

Serves 4-6

A rich, creamy fish chowder is the ultimate comfort food on a freezing winter's day. For a change, replace the prawns with crab or mussels.

50g butter
1 large onion, chopped
300g celery sticks, chopped
1 bay leaf
350g potatoes, diced
pinch of cayenne
grating of fresh nutmeg
300ml milk
450g undyed smoked haddock, skinned and cut into bite-sized chunks
125g cooked prawns
4 poached eggs to serve, optional
fresh dill or chervil, to garnish

- 1 Melt the butter in a large pan and gently fry the onion and celery with the bay leaf for 15 minutes until softened but not coloured. Stir in the potatoes and spices, and cook for 1 minute.
- 2 Pour in the milk and 100ml of water, bring to the boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook gently, covered, for 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Discard the bay leaf and purée the soup in the pan with a hand blender (or in batches in a food processor) until smooth.
- 3 Gently stir in the haddock. Cover and simmer over a low heat for 5-10 minutes until the fish is cooked through. Carefully stir in the prawns, cover and remove from the heat. Leave to stand for 2 minutes.
- 4 Divide the soup among 4-6 shallow bowls and top with a poached egg, if using, and a sprinkling of dill or chervil.





HARISSA LAMB AND CHICKPEA SOUP

Preparation 10 minutes Cooking about 20 minutes Serves 4

Increase the spiciness by adding a drizzle of chilli oil as you serve.

1 tbsp olive oil
225g lamb fillet, cut into thin strips
1 medium onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
½-1 tsp rose harissa
400g tin chopped tomatoes
500ml hot lamb stock
400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
100g baby spinach leaves
50g feta, crumbled
drizzle of chilli oil (optional)

1 Heat the oil in a large pan and stir-fry the lamb over a high heat for 2 minutes until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside.

2 Lower the heat and add the onion along with a large pinch of salt. Fry gently for 5 minutes until softened slightly, then turn up the heat and cook, stirring often, until lightly golden. Add the garlic and harissa and fry for 1 minute.

3 Pour in the tomatoes and stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the chickpeas and cook for a further 5 minutes.

4 Return the lamb to the pan and heat through for 2 minutes, then stir in the spinach leaves until wilted. Check the seasoning. Serve in warm bowls with the feta and chilli oil on top. 



SPLIT PEA AND HAM SOUP

Preparation 20 minutes, plus soaking

Cooking 4 hours 15 minutes Serves 6

This does take a few hours to prepare but it is worth the effort and can bubble happily alone on the hob while you're busy elsewhere. If you don't want to make it from scratch, use good-quality ham stock and a pack of shredded ham hock, although it won't be as good.

FOR THE STOCK

1kg ham hock
a few leek trimmings
1 carrot, chopped
1 celery stick, chopped
1 small onion, quartered
1 bay leaf
6 black peppercorns

FOR THE SOUP

50g butter
1 medium onion, chopped

1 celery stick, chopped

200g yellow split peas

1 litre hot ham stock

TO GARNISH

3 tbsp crème fraîche
a handful of shredded ham
50g frozen peas, cooked and drained
few sprigs fresh mint

① Soak the ham hock overnight

in cold water. Drain.

② Put the ham hock in a large pan and cover with fresh cold water. Add the vegetables, bay leaf and peppercorns and bring to just under the boil. Simmer for 2-3 hours, skimming away any scum and fat on the surface, until the meat comes away very easily from the bone.

③ Strain the ham stock into a bowl. Discard the vegetables. When the ham is cool enough to handle, strip the meat from the fat and bone, shred it and set aside.

④ To make the soup, melt the

butter in a large pan and gently fry the onion and celery for 15 minutes until softened but not coloured.

⑤ Add the split peas and the stock. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 1 hour until the peas are tender and broken down. Purée with a hand-held blender in the pan, or blend in batches using a food processor.

⑥ Serve the soup in warmed bowls and garnish with a dollop of crème fraîche, a handful of shredded ham and a sprinkling of the cooked peas and mint. ➤

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CHUNKY ROOT VEGETABLE AND LENTIL SOUP

Preparation 15 minutes Cooking about 40 minutes Serves 6

Using Biona Worcester sauce instead of traditional Worcestershire sauce (which contains anchovies) makes this flavour-packed soup a great option for vegetarians.

3 tbsp olive oil
400g carrots, sliced
500g parsnips, diced
400g leeks, sliced
1 bay leaf
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tbsp tomato purée
300g red lentils

1.7 litres hot vegetable stock
few drops Biona Worcester sauce (available from most large supermarkets)
FOR THE CROUTONS
ciabatta loaf, cut into thin slices
olive oil, for brushing
1 garlic clove, halved

- 1 Heat the oil in a large pan and gently fry the vegetables over a low heat with the bay leaf and a large pinch of salt for 15 minutes until softened.
- 2 Add the garlic, smoked paprika and tomato purée and fry for 1 minute.
- 3 Stir in the lentils, then pour in the stock and a dash of the Biona Worcester sauce. Bring to the boil, then simmer, covered, for 20-25 minutes until the vegetables are tender.
- 4 Meanwhile, make the ciabatta croutons. Heat the oven to 170°C (150°C fan oven) gas mark 3. Arrange the ciabatta slices on a baking sheet in one layer. Brush with oil and bake for 10 minutes until golden, turning halfway through. Remove from the oven and rub each one with the cut side of the garlic. Serve at once with the soup. 



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TRAINS & TRAILS IN SWITZERLAND

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN

Just a few miles but a world away from the glamour and glitz of St Moritz lies the peaceful village of Zuoz, the tall decorative buildings, cobbled streets and imposing central square harking back to its medieval origins. Stepping off the train from Zurich – a swift service that runs, as you'd expect, like Swiss clockwork – the only sound in the late afternoon is the tinkle of cowbells as a dairy herd ambles to the milking parlour from its upland pasture.

Farming is central to this community of just 1,200 people in the enchanting Engadine valley. Tractors are tucked under the eaves of sturdy stone-and-wood houses, and the surrounding meadows are dotted with wooden huts still used for storing hay. The region even has its own arcane language, Romansch, spoken by just one per cent of the nation as a whole, but by a quarter of those in the south-east corner of Switzerland.

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

I was apprehensive as I set off on my first self-guided walk from the elegant Hotel Engiadina, equipped with waterproofs, walking poles and a picnic (a chance to use my Swiss Army knife). I'm inept with maps but the walking notes provided were

meticulous, so any twinge of uncertainty was allayed with 'Ignore the sign on your left' or 'Look for a crossroads of paths, which we have marked with a stone cairn'. At times, it felt like a treasure hunt – and what treasures! In mid-September, wild flowers were still in bloom – scabious, gentian, anemones, edelweiss – while on the forest floor, the first autumn fungi were emerging. As I climbed to the summit of Alp Arpiglia, at 2,129 metres, breathless from exhilaration and the thin air, I had magnificent views along the River Inn.

The descent was punctuated with the whistling of marmots – the size and colour of a brown hare – on hind legs outside their burrows. They like to rub against the waymark signs, obliterating the paint, making walking notes even more valuable.

A MOVEABLE FEAST

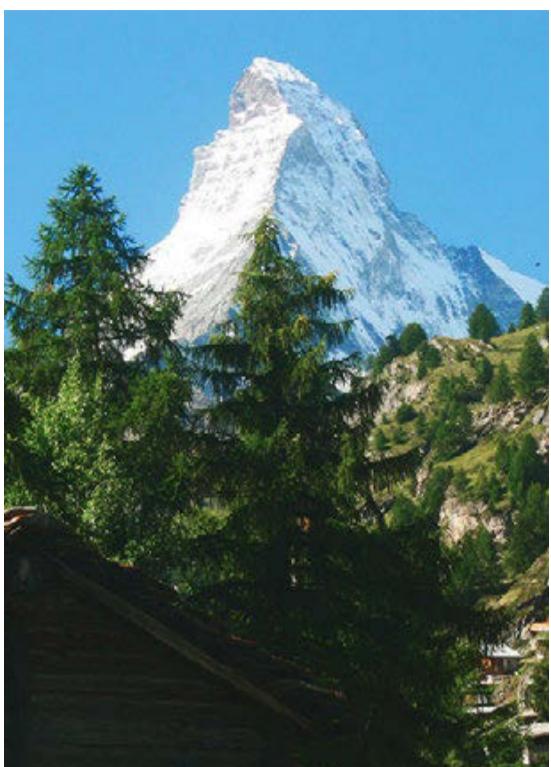
By day three I was ready to put my feet up and enjoyed a spell on the luxurious Glacier Express, which took me to my next walking location beyond the Oberalp Pass in the west. This is billed as the world's slowest express train, where the leisurely pace is an accolade, inviting you to enjoy the majestic gorges, snow-capped peaks,

cascading waterfalls and ice-blue lakes along the way, at 24mph through sightseeing windows. It's a transport of delight, ferrying you along dramatic viaducts, through 91 tunnels and across 291 bridges on the entire route, ending at the ski resort of Zermatt. Opened in 1930 initially as a summer-only service, it has run year-round since 1982 and is used by both tourists and commuters as part of an integrated network.

A sumptuous three-course lunch is served at your table. I had a dish of leeks, apples, potatoes and cheese in a covered pastry pie. It is called *cholera* and was devised out of necessity when an outbreak of the disease in 1830 confined people to their homes, where they had to survive on storecupboard staples. The pie retained its popularity and the name stuck.

RUSTIC AND ROMANTIC

I opened my bedroom window at the Aparthotel Castle in Blitzen, on a branch line from the Glacier Express stop at Oberwald, to be greeted by goats nibbling on the grassy slope. My own lonely goat herd! When they scampered down towards a denim-clad woman with a metal churn



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; KITTY CORRIGAN; GETTY

TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP...

- Sample the local wines, such as the Johannisberg, which are excellent and rarely exported, so enjoy them as much as you can while you are there.
- Swiss German is the language spoken in this region – learning a smattering of German before you travel will be helpful.
- Buy a Swiss Pass, which offers unrestricted train travel for, typically, four days of the eight-day holiday, plus half-price fares on extra trips. It's simple, cost-effective and saves queuing for tickets.



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE The Glacier Express; a typical Swiss chalet; the Matterhorn; in the cable car; antiques hunting; Kitty takes a turn at milking

on her back, I needed no encouragement to join them for the evening milking session. Claudia, the goat herder, knows each of her 'family' by name, and, after her twice-daily collection, makes cheese to be served in the Aparthotel Castle – food minutes, not miles. Peter, the owner, is an accomplished chef, so dinner was a memorable occasion, with velvety soups, homemade truffle-flavoured pasta, and patisserie with fresh myrtle berries (not forgetting Claudia's cheese).

In the Goms Valley in Valais canton, walking along the River Rhône (here called the Rotten), I was struck by the number of villages with huge, ornate churches, all well-maintained and attended. I spent one day hopping on and off the train, feeling like a seasoned Swiss traveller, pressing the button for *Halt auf verlangen* ('request stop' – or I might have ended up in Italy) to explore as many as possible. Münster, in particular, appealed because of its jumble of ancient wooden houses charred black by the Alpine sun, and barns resting on staddle stones – referred to as mousetraps – to deter rodents from eating the grain.

THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

My final self-guided routes were around Zermatt, at the foot of the Matterhorn, where I stayed at the glamorous Hotel La Ginabelle. Famous for its 365 days of skiing, Zermatt is also paradise for walkers, with options for high- and low-level walks, thundery weather and – my favourite – lazy days. You can glide silently up the slopes in a cable car for lunch at a rustic *gasthof* (pub), then walk down and visit the excellent Matterhorn Museum.

By the time I boarded the train back to Zurich, I had gained the confidence to book a self-guided walking trip again, knowing there would be the right balance of open-air adventure and wonderful places to stay and eat, accessible by rail or on foot. 

Glacier Express in Summer from the Engadine Valley to the Valais from £1,240 per person based on two sharing, seven nights' half board, standard-class rail travel for journeys between hotels and from/to airport excluding flights. Available 14 June-5 October 2015. Inntravel (01653 617007; inntravel.co.uk). For more details on visiting Switzerland, see myswitzerland.com.



PEDAL POWER IN MALLORCA

WORDS BY LOUISE ELLIOTT

A patchwork of small farms, fields of rich red earth parted in furrows, silvery-leaved gnarled olive trees and rugged limestone mountains rising into the blue, blue sky... A tantalising glimpse of Mallorca's rural landscape flashed past as a taxi sped us from Palma's crowds of sun-worshipping tourists to our starting point on the southern tip of this Balearic island. Arriving at the first hotel whetted my appetite even further for our six-night, two-wheeled adventure. At the end of a long bumpy track lined with tall swaying palm trees, Es Torrent is a beautifully restored stone *finca* (farmhouse) now run as an agriturismo. Sitting outside in the tranquil courtyard, my husband and I listened to the sound of hens clucking in the garden and watched fresh vegetables being brought over to the kitchen for supper. The courgette soup and slow-cooked lamb we later enjoyed were a delicious way to fuel up for our first ride.

SALT AND SEA

Panniers packed and itinerary studied over breakfast (which included the moreish *ensaimada*, a traditional coiled

sweet bread dusted with powdered sugar), we hit the road for a gentle 22km circular pedal around coastal plains, sand dunes and salt flats. As a regular bike commuter, I was excited about swapping London's streets for country terrain, while my husband, a very occasional cyclist, felt slightly anxious – he needn't have worried, though. All the routes are carefully planned to link up quiet tracks and lanes (the short stretches on busy roads are few and far between), and he soon felt confident enough to enjoy the views: sunlight glinting on the pink-tinged dry-stone walls of small farmyards, with oranges ripening in every garden. Half of the island's 600,000 inhabitants live in the capital but much of the rest of Mallorca is devoted to horticulture – horses can still be seen pulling ploughs across the narrow, terraced fields.

There's a wonderful freedom about travelling by bike – you can stop where and when you please. Spotting a sign for Las Salinas, we pulled up to watch the birdlife that flocks to these 150-acre salt flats, including pied avocets, herons, gulls and large colonies of flamingos. The warm

late-September sunshine meant we were in need of a cooling dip when we arrived at the coast at Es Trenc. This is Mallorca's longest natural beach, a pristine expanse of white sand edged with pine trees, and its warm, turquoise waters were ideal for soothing our slightly weary legs.

MARKETS AND CAFÉS

The northward journey to our next destination (luggage is efficiently transported between hotels) immersed us even further in Mallorca's pastoral landscape, increasingly dominated by orchards of fruit and nuts, and we loved being off the beaten track. We saw farmers perched on ladders beating down their almond crops with sticks – visit in the springtime and the expanse of blossom is a breathtaking sight. Fields were planted with carob trees, their black pods dangling from the bright-green leaves, while dates hung on the palm trees. Journeying slowly through the countryside, we began to feel part of it and the way of life. Enjoying a plate of sticky, sugary palmier pastries as we sat outside Pasteleria Pomar, said to be the island's best patisserie, in the



honey-stoned Roman town of Campos, we watched shoppers at the market fill their baskets with produce we had seen growing in the fields – melons, peppers, aubergines and tomatoes of all shapes and sizes.

After 25km, we reached Son Mercadal, a 19th-century farmhouse set in seven hectares of land, with a satisfying sense of achievement. Run by the Ruig family, this charming hotel is filled with antique pieces and collections of china and rural ephemera. The simple rustic cooking added to our impression of staying in a private home and included the best

TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP...

- Pack a copy of *Wild Flowers and Scenery of Mallorca* by Nicole T Beniston (Editorial Moll, £12.99) to help you identify the island's beautiful flora.
- Make time to visit the prehistoric village at Son Fornes on day four, with megalithic stone dwellings that date back to 1,300BC.
- Add on a few extra days at the end for some well-earned relaxation after the cycling – we headed to the Son Barbassa hotel (sonbarbassa.com) on the eastern coast. Read a book by the swimming pool surrounded by olive groves, or stroll along quiet lanes to the cove of Cala Agulla.

paella I've ever tasted and fresh eggs for breakfast from the hens that roam freely around the lush garden.

MILLS AND MOUNTAINS

Leaving Son Mercadal along lanes edged with fig and quince trees laden with fruit, we journeyed to the heart of the island. Views of the rugged Serra de Tramuntana mountains began to open up and stone-capped circular mills replaced the metal structures we had seen in the south. Eight of these fringe the hilltop town of Montuïri, where we stopped for a slice of *pa amb oli*, bread rubbed with olive oil, tomato and garlic. Simply delicious.

The fascinating town of Sineu, once the site of an important royal residence for the kings of 14th-century Mallorca, was our last stopping place. Home for the next two nights was the Can Joan Campo hotel. With its stylish modern rustic decor – think exposed beams, whitewashed walls and architectural ironwork – it has

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE

Hotel Son Mercadal; one of the many mills; Louise checks the route; market produce; the pool at Son Barbassa; horses and donkeys still work the land

a wonderful feeling of light and space. It was the most luxurious of our stays, and the full-sized bath with massage jets most welcome after 140km in the saddle. As I lay back, I heard the bells of the 13th-century Nostra Senyora de los Angeles striking atmospherically in the main square.

The final ride was perhaps the most beautiful: a circular exploration of Es Pla – the fertile plain of central Mallorca where hundreds of small farms produce cereal crops, nuts, fruit and wine. The only noise as we pedalled was the sound of sheep bells tinkling as the animals grazed beneath ancient olive trees. Small black pigs munched on the acorns of holm oaks, September lambs took their first steps in the fields, while wood and vine cuttings were stacked ready for winter fires.

Finishing our trip on a Wednesday meant we could experience the market in Sineu, the oldest and largest on the island. With little room in my suitcase, I made my choices carefully – a stick of dried herbs to burn and scent our home with the wild fragrances of Mallorca, a bag of freshly shelled almonds and a jar of plump, dried figs. But I didn't need much to remind me of this magical trip – every kilometre I'd cycled was in my memory to stay. 

Southern Beaches to Central Plain cycling break costs from £782 per person based on two sharing and six nights' half board (excluding flights). Available 1 March to 21 June and 1 September to 31 October 2015. Inntravel (01653 617007; inntravel.co.uk).



A HOME ON THE WAVES IN SUFFOLK

WORDS BY MICHELE JAMESON

At the bow of our houseboat, with the sound of water lapping at the sides, and the beating of birds' wings in the air, I sat and read a copy of Arthur Ransome's book *We Didn't Mean to go to Sea*. Describing the distinctive scenery of the River Orwell at Pin Mill in Suffolk in 1937, he wrote: "Green fields sloped down to the water's edge on one side. On the other, further side, was a sea wall covered with long grass and green salttings and shining mud uncovered by the tide. Cormorants were on the edge of the mud, like black sentinels..." Accompanying this were enchanting black-and-white illustrations of the dinghies bobbing on the water, the 500-year-old Butt & Oyster pub and the houses next door. Looking across at this scene, with gulls and waders hopping on the mudflats and moored vessels awaiting their next voyage, I could see how little the shoreline had changed in this time, making it the ideal spot for a long weekend escape with my mum and her cousin.

ALL ABOARD

Moored at the Harry King boatyard in the estuary village of Pin Mill, I felt deeply

rooted in the nautical world. The 16.5m-long *Twee Gebroeders* (Two Brothers) is a delightful 100-year-old Dutch barge owned by Tim and Gill Allen, who bought her in 2008 and spent years restoring her. Today, she is resplendent in iron and solid iroko, with a teak tiller and a Douglas-fir mast.

When we first arrived, we stepped onto the pontoon and walked precariously alongside the boat to jump on board – this became easier as we acquired our sea legs. The living area is charming with soft-pink upholstery – striped ticking seats and cushions, and cream and pink curtains in a pretty cow-parsley pattern. Delicate Delft tiles set off the gleaming red Aga (besides which hangs a watercolour of the barge painted by the Allens' first customer), a welcome source of warmth on chilly days. Along the corridor are shelves with an ample supply of guidebooks, novels and games. Two cabins (one twin, one double) provide comfortable accommodation, and there is also a bathroom with a shower – we were all pleasantly surprised at the luxuriousness of our home on the waves.

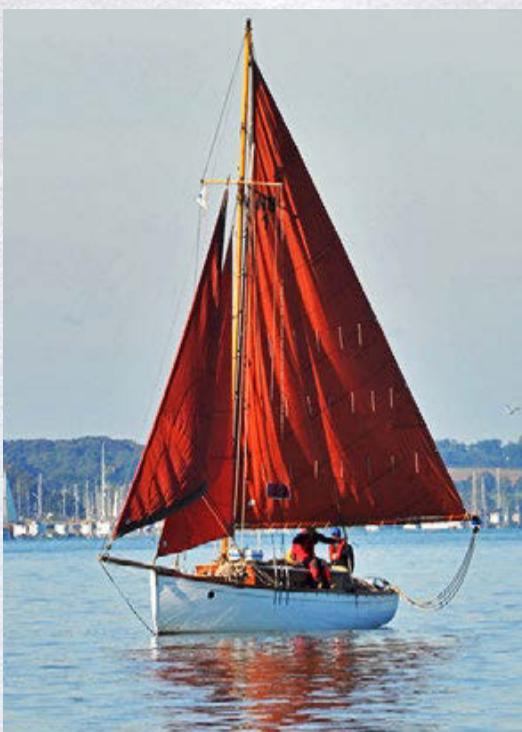
Eager to explore the area, we crossed onto dry land and breathed in the heady

scent of salt and seaweed. After taking a long walk through the National Trust-protected woods, we passed pink-painted Alma Cottage – where Ransome stayed and wrote – then visited Pin Mill Gallery and Studio. The popular Butt & Oyster was our final stop, where we indulged in a well-deserved pint of Adnams' Topaz Gold before tucking into freshly caught cod. The characterful pub became a regular pit-stop during our stay, as we were drawn by its unique atmosphere and sense of history.

TIME AND TIDE

This part of the coast is rich with wildlife and presents numerous opportunities to get close to nature, including at Minsmere RSPB reserve and Orford Ness. There are plenty of scenic walking routes, too, and pretty places to explore such as Aldeburgh and Dunwich further north. Suffolk is also a major foodies' paradise, with local produce being championed in the area's shops and eateries – Snape Maltings, Suffolk Food Hall and Jimmy's Farm being just a few.

As the sun went down each day at Pin Mill, I was conscious of the complete silence all around us, and my senses soon



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE *Twee Gebroeders* at Pin Mill; *Nancy Blackett* sailing on the estuary; training yachts; Michele at the helm; grazing sheep; the River Orwell at dusk; Jimmy's Farm is a nearby place to visit



TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP...

- Take a notebook and pen for all your wildlife i-Spy moments.
- Look out for the on-board nature bag, which contains binoculars, magnifying glasses, crabbing lines, fishing rods and bug-hunting equipment.
- Pack your clothes in a soft bag rather than a hard case, so you can squeeze it out of the way in a nook or cranny on the boat.

became heightened. It was still, quiet and very dark – the woods behind us were eerily solid in the gloom, but the boats' masts stood out against the sky, highlighted by the moon. Being aboard *Twee Gebroeders* was tranquil, even on less balmy days. The harbour always felt peaceful apart from the captivating sounds of a solitary bell, the tapping of tools against metal in the boatyard, squabbling gulls, voices of walkers thrown by the breeze, and godwits picking their feet out of the sticky mud.

SMOOTH SAILING

During our stay, we were lucky enough to be taken out on the nine-mile stretch of the River Orwell by Tim and photographer Gill, who snapped away at our surroundings. Accompanied by the hum of the engine, we glided past splendid boats, including oyster smacks, Thames barges and racing yachts. At one point, I took the helm and found it surprisingly easy to steer the tiller... at least for a little while! The direction in



which we were heading meant I had to look for the port and starboard marks – red buoys on my left and green to my right – and, as we chugged along, Tim regaled us with fascinating tales about the area, as well as stories and history of the boats we saw. The estuary is stunning – the Nacton shore side is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where fossilised shark's teeth can be found on the beach, while the other is a Site of Special Scientific Interest where we spied cormorants, egrets and oystercatchers. Seals can also often be seen here, as they enjoy catching the mullet and sea bass. It was also a huge contrast with the silhouette of Felixstowe docks up ahead. We reached a buoy marking the start of the North Sea and, after narrowly missing our own 'I Didn't Mean To Go To Sea' moment, we sat and relished the scenery around us. A highlight for Mum and me was seeing the naval establishment HMS Ganges at Shotley, where my dad trained as a young man. Another was spotting the beautiful *Nancy Blackett*, which Ransome sailed and was the inspiration for his classic seafaring book.

Due to the tides, we spent our last night moored upriver in Woolverstone Marina, where we ate plaice at The Wheelhouse. Later, as we enjoyed another glass of local ale, I considered the view of vessels on the estuary framed by the countryside, and realised that, above all else, the trip had taught me to slow down and enjoy the moment. And in the knowledge that I was admiring the same vista that Ransome had almost 80 years ago, I appreciated its captivating quality even more. ☺

Twee Gebroeders accommodates four people and costs from £110 per night (0117 204 7830; canopyandstars.co.uk).





RIDING HIGH IN THE AZORES

WORDS BY SUE GILKES

Emerging from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, windswept and remote, the Azores has an elemental, enigmatic appeal. An ancient archipelago made up of nine volcanic islands, lying more than 850 miles west of Portugal, it is thought to be the site of mythical Atlantis and is certainly off the beaten track. São Miguel, the largest, has a landscape ranging from mountains, forests and lakes to plains, promontories and beaches – and what better way to explore it than on horseback?

HORSING AROUND

Driving through the old bougainvillea-clad arch that marks the entrance to Quinta da Terça ranch, near the main town of Ponta Delgada, on a sunny Sunday morning, I felt a mix of excitement and trepidation. I had only ever been on a horse once or twice as a child but was here to learn to ride in a week.

After being welcomed by Swedish owner Christina de Laval, who runs the riding school with her husband Claude, and shown around the pretty 17th-century farmhouse, it was straight on with the jodhpurs! I was introduced to my main steed for the day, the handsome Chico – one of 36 horses

or *cavalos* of varying colours, sizes, ages, temperaments and velocity at Quinta, many of them pure or cross (*cruzado*) Lusitano, the highly prized Portuguese breed.

Christina put me through my paces in the *picadeiro*, an indoor riding arena built in the same attractive rustic style as the main house, with a sand and sawdust floor for soft landings. Later, mounted on Compadre, a trusty older ride and one of many rescue horses lovingly rehabilitated by the couple, I learned the correct way to hold both myself (very upright and evenly balanced, with shoulders well back) and the reins (hands together, with thumbs pointing forward as if carrying two mugs of tea, and elbows at hip height) while walking round the ring.

IN THE SADDLE

Chico and I were reunited for an outing that afternoon to the lush forest of Mata Santa, where acacias, eucalyptus and native laurels flourish alongside hibiscus, begonias and red-hot pokers. Chico showed great interest in the local flora, too, stopping frequently to grab large mouthfuls of his favourites.

The next morning, feeling rather saddle sore, I returned to the *picadeiro* for another

lesson, this time with expert horseman and resident instructor Rodrigo, who patiently initiated me into the arcane art of the rising trot. I practised this tricky manoeuvre in the afternoon on Tareia, a lovely chestnut rescue mare, as we made our way along meandering paths between high walls of grey volcanic rock built a couple of centuries earlier to protect the island's orange groves when this crop was a major export. A blight wiped out the industry a long time ago but the walls remain, dotted with silvery-grey lichen, velvety mosses and delicate ferns unfurling from damp, shady crevices. Brilliant blue trumpets of morning glory cascaded over the top, contrasting with bright orange nasturtiums and pretty pink nerines, framing views across vivid green fields to the shimmering sea beyond.

After a day in the fresh air, Quinta is a great place to relax. With its whitewashed stone walls, traditional red-tiled floors and exposed beams, it has rustic charm in abundance. The rambling building can accommodate just ten guests in its five comfortable rooms, which gives it a friendly, informal air, with the cosy sitting room an inviting place to compare notes with fellow



TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP...

- Go whale watching – The Azores is one of the best places in the world to encounter whales and dolphins. Boat trips run all year round and in spring you may even see blue whales (bigblue-adventures.com).
- Visit Furnas with its lush botanical garden and thermal springs, and stop off at a pineapple (*ananas*) plantation on the way.
- Take a hike! There's a wealth of wonderful scenery to explore, from coastal paths to volcanic ridges. Whether you prefer gentle strolls or challenging ascents, you'll find a mix of routes at trails.visitazores.com/en.



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE Sete Cidades; prized *ananas*; at a gallop; Quinta; Ponta Delgada; Sue has some Chico time!

riders before supper. This was a very convivial affair, with Christina's excellent cooking a daily highlight, particularly her sensational puddings (including the very memorable chocolate-mint cake) that finished off the meal each evening.

ON THE TRAIL

Not for nothing is São Miguel known as the Green Island. Over the week we went on a mix of half- and full-day rides showcasing its stunning variety of scenery. Travelling on deserted paths and old roads, buzzards soaring overhead, we passed fields and farms as we wound our way uphill to summits with panoramic views across to the coast, or dropped down into rainforest jungle, dripping with tropical vegetation. Seas of ginger lilies, their fragrant yellow flowers a tasty equine treat, invariably lined our way. In the late afternoons, we would encounter weather-beaten farmers and their dogs in verdant hilly pastures, milking their herds.

On our last day, we geared up for an outing to Sete Cidades, site of an extinct volcano and one of the main natural attractions on the island. Riding along high, windswept tracks, edged with exquisite hydrangeas, we followed the rim of the *caldeira* (crater), with vertiginous drops and spectacular vistas on either side. The famous Vista do Rei lookout offered a breathtaking view of the two coloured lakes that fill the crater: emerald-green Lagoa Verde and deep-blue Lagoa Azul, separated in the middle by a stone bridge. After leading the horses down a very steep section of track, we descended to gentler terrain through woods with leaves turning glorious autumnal colours.

Our morning's exertions were rewarded with a delicious picnic overlooking the lakes, which included fresh local *pasteis de nata* (custard tarts). Later on, we rode along the shoreline and I tried cantering for the first time – an utterly exhilarating experience. As the horses splashed about in the water to cool off, it seemed the perfect end to an unforgettable week of exciting discoveries – not just of the enchanting Azores but of my own unexpected new-found skill. 

In the Saddle specialises in global riding holidays (01299 272997; inthesaddle.com). Stay at Quinta da Terça from £927 for six days' riding, seven nights' full board (year round, excludes flights). See visitazores.com.

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THE URBAN ARTISAN

Chloe Giordano, embroiderer and illustrator, Oxford

Looking at the intricacy of her eye-catching embroideries, it's hard to believe that Chloe Giordano taught herself to sew just four years ago. The tiny stitches that make up her beautiful wildlife pictures, which include rabbits among flowers, sleeping fawns, and squirrels leaping through horse chestnuts and falling leaves, seem to be the work of a far more experienced needlewoman. "I use four or five shades of the same colour to add depth and richness to the images," says Chloe, who is just 26. Little wonder that even a small piece can take two days to complete.

In Chloe's last year studying illustration at the University of the West of England in Bristol, she saw the fantasy film *The Science of Sleep* and was so inspired by production designer Lauri Faggioni's sewn sculptures that she decided to copy one. Since then, Chloe has stitched many creations for which she first produces detailed drawings. Living on the outskirts of Oxford, she spends time in the surrounding countryside gleaning ideas for new projects, taking photographs and collecting foliage for future reference. Currently working on ideas for greetings cards, Chloe is enjoying the creative variety that her work as both embroiderer and illustrator offers, including painting window designs such as Alice in Wonderland and Grimm's Fairy Tales themes in Oxford's Waterstones, and working on an eagle stitched project, which is sure to be, like her other pieces, an heirloom of the future.

Prices for Chloe's work range from £90 to £1,000. To find out more, see chloegiordano.com.



ESCAPE THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE York Apartment, York



"A chic pied-a-terre that's a perfect base for exploring the walled city"

Just a few steps down from a stunning Victorian house in a quiet leafy road, and within walking distance of the city centre, you'll find this tranquil apartment, decorated in greys and whites, with period French furniture and oak flooring. Owners David Campbell, an artist, and designer Anita Evagora live in the house above and restored the basement as a self-catering bolthole for two, adding touches such as striking artworks and glass-shade light fittings, both created by David. The double room, with an antique French carved bed, linen sheets, armoire and elegant mirror, is separated from the living area by 18th-century partly glazed château doors, which flood the interior with light and allow glimpses of the courtyard garden beyond. The sense of style and comfort continues in the en-suite wetroom, featuring a rainfall shower and organic beauty products, and well-equipped kitchen, with Victorian tiles and recycled slate worktops. You'll even find breakfast ingredients provided, including organic eggs, artisan bread, preserves, freshly ground coffee and Yorkshire tea. In fact, staying here will be as memorable as a trip to the Minster. *From £140 per night, minimum two-night stay (0117 204 7810; sawdays.co.uk).*

TRY A TRADITIONAL SKILL Cheesemaking

Louise Talbot, a member of the Specialist Cheesemakers Association, will introduce the basics of this time-honoured craft in an afternoon session in Gloucester, during which you can produce soft varieties and return home with recipes and a selection of cheeses.

*14 February 2015, 1.30-5pm;
£65 (0870 961 9030;
darlingcollective.com). *





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Traditional brushes laid out in vintage drawers, galvanised pots holding wooden spoons and classic carpet beaters in tall glass jars by the window: just a selection of the rustic home accessories that are bound to tempt you at Providence. Choosing the best locally and British-made products, owner Kathy Ritchie has created a city-centre shop full of country charm. The main focus is the bespoke hand-painted furniture crafted by the shop's own team in the Cambridgeshire countryside, as well as the chalky emulsion and water-based eggshell paint ranges, available in 132 colours mixed in store, including shades such as blue-grey 'Cedar' and yellow-moss 'St Ives Rooftop'. You can also find a beeswax polish made in nearby Cottenham, hardwood light pulls, bootjacks and Shaker-style peg rails from Creamore Mill in Shropshire, and naturally scented products by Cornwall's St Eval Candle Company.

Providence (01223 506556; providenceuk.com). Open Monday-Friday, 10.30am-5.30pm; Saturday 10am-5.30pm.

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SEEK OUT A GREEN SPACE Walkden Gardens, Manchester

Wist and turn your way around the tall beech hedges that divide this five-acre horticultural gem to discover a series of beautifully planted garden rooms leading off a grassy walkway, inspired by Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire. Created in the 1950s on the site of an old nursery, this secret space is tucked away on a suburban street – until recently, even many locals didn't know of its existence as it's so well hidden. Here, you can enjoy the feeling of being constantly surprised: stroll around the conifer garden – often dusted with frost or snow in February – wander through the miniature arboretum or see the colourful camellias in bloom along the cherry walk. The 70-foot-long wisteria arch adds to the enchanted atmosphere, along with a magnificent Japanese garden with curved pathways and pretty glades, while clipped box hedging contains borders filled with fascinating fuchsias. Exhibitions are regularly held inside the Grade II-listed dovecote (above), which was rescued from the grounds of Sale Old Hall and dates back to the 1840s. The large lawned area is regularly used as an open-air performance space for musical and theatrical events, with delicious homemade refreshments served in the intervals.

Open daily, 9am-7pm (walkdengardens.co.uk).



SAVOUR NATURE'S FLAVOURS Chocolate

Chococo, 152 High Street, Winchester, Hampshire (01929 421777; chococo.co.uk)

A perfect idea for Valentine's Day, the fresh chocolates created by this award-winning artisan chocolatier incorporate cream from outdoor dairy herds that are grazed on a family-run Dorset farm. The tempting selection includes specialities such as a rose-scented ganache and a chocolate made with watercress-infused gin from Winchester's Twisted Gin distillery, as well as flavours that incorporate fresh mint and honey from local hives.



BE A CITY NATURALIST
Flora and fauna
in urban areas
*What to look out
for this month**

WHOOPER SWAN

(*Cygnus cygnus*)

You will only see this black-and-yellow-billed bird (above) in winter, when it migrates to the UK from its Arctic breeding grounds to congregate on city waterways, and in parks and on football pitches to graze on the grass**.

HERALD MOTH

(*Scoliopteryx libatrix*)

Spot this overwintering insect in urban outbuildings when its wings are closed, displaying a shield-like design and bronze-orange markings. On mild days, it may emerge to feed on fallen fruit or hibernal-flowering plants.

WOOD MOUSE

(*Apodemus sylvaticus*)

This is a visitor to urban gardens during the colder months when it's likely to emerge at dusk to eat seeds and nuts from bird-feeding stations, as well as berries of shrubs such as cotoneaster.

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LIFT YOUR SPIRITS



Brighten up the dark days of winter with these winning ways to boost your mood

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER

“**I**ow mood is very common in winter, and one of the biggest factors is thought to be the decreased levels of light, which can affect our sleep patterns, appetites and energy levels,” says Sam Challis of the mental health charity Mind (mind.org.uk). In fact, it’s estimated that as many as two million people in the UK suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), with even more experiencing a lesser form of winter blues. The good news is that many of us can benefit from the following natural mood boosters....

GET DIGGING

We now have another great excuse for a potter in the garden, thanks to the discovery of a harmless, feel-good bacteria commonly found in dirt and soil. Scientists at the University of Bristol have discovered that *Mycobacterium vaccae* has anti-depressant qualities and can also reduce anxiety.

FEEL THE COLD

Far from dampening your mood, cold water may stimulate your senses. “Immersion in cooler water creates an endorphin rush that gives a feeling of elation,” says Daniel Start, author of *Wild Swimming* (Wild Things Publishing, £16.99). But if an icy swim sounds too much, save the open water for the warmer months and start feeling the benefit now by alternating 30-second blasts of warm and cold water in the shower. “The idea stems from Ayurvedic medicine,” explains naturopath Rick Hay. “While our bodies don’t cope well with prolonged stress, short bursts can produce serotonin in our brains and give us a natural lift.”

CLEAR YOUR MIND

We all know we need to eat enough fruit and vegetables to keep our bodies healthy, but your mind needs its five a day too, says Andy Gibson, founder of Mindapples (mindapples.org), a voluntary group of psychology enthusiasts passionate about teaching people how to be aware of thought patterns. "We should all work as many breathers into our days as we can – caring for your mind should be as natural as cleaning your teeth," he says. Different activities work for different people. These could be as simple as knitting a few rows of your latest craft project, or sharing a pot of tea with a friend. "It's not the specifics that count," Andy says, "but feeling in control and making time for things you enjoy."

COLOUR YOURSELF HAPPY

Get out the crayons, because adult colouring books are the latest stress-busting active meditation. Having outstripped sales of cookery books in France last summer, where the trend first began, colouring is the art therapy *du jour*. "It's a very relaxing activity that allows us to be creative and indulge the right side of our brains, and calms our parasympathetic nervous system, which controls relaxation," explains neurophysiologist Dr Nerina Ramlakhan. Colour also stimulates your visual cortex, making it a doubly uplifting activity. Try the intricately beautiful *The Secret Garden: An Inky Treasure Hunt and Colouring Book* by Johanna Basford (Laurence King, £9.95).

SOAK UP THE SUNSHINE

"Low vitamin D levels are linked to poor mood and depression," says dietitian Helen Bond. "The major source comes from the action of sunlight on skin, so it's important to get outside more and build up enough stores in spring and summer," she says. If you haven't, you will need to get your vitamin D in other ways during the winter. Oily fish, such as mackerel and sardines, are good sources, or try the new Vitamin D Mushrooms from Marks and Spencer (£1.20, 200g). Grown in bright light instead of darkness, the UV light stimulates the mushrooms to convert natural sterols into vitamin D – which means that although they look and taste the same as normal mushrooms, eating just three will provide 100 per cent of your recommended daily amount.

STRIKE A POSE

Practising yoga can increase levels of the amino acid GABA in the brain, reducing anxiety and promoting a sense of wellbeing. "Yoga develops a sense of body awareness and creates a break from relentless thought patterns," explains yoga teacher Gemma Ford of Love Yoga Online.

To combat the round-shouldered hunched posture that is common in office workers, try the fish pose (Matsyasana). "This simple back bend should be approached carefully by beginners, but is a very energising move that is fantastic for opening your chest and allowing you to breathe deeply into your lungs. It also opens up the heart space, which helps you to feel uplifted," Gemma explains. 



CHOOSE MORE FEEL-GOOD FOOD

Boost your brain's happy chemicals over the winter months by adding tryptophan to your diet. This amino acid, present in protein-rich foods such as seeds, seafood, game, turkey and spinach, increases levels of the hormone serotonin, and can also help you get a better night's sleep. "Tryptophan is a dual agent that is metabolised into serotonin during daylight hours and the sleep-inducing melatonin at night," explains nutritionist and pharmaceutical analyst Mike Wakeman. It should always be taken with carbohydrates, which trigger the release of insulin and help it to enter the brain where it's used to make serotonin. Try unwinding with a bedtime mug of Zenbev (£25.99 for a 250g tub; zenbev.co.uk), a source of tryptophan, made from pumpkin seeds and other natural ingredients.

TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

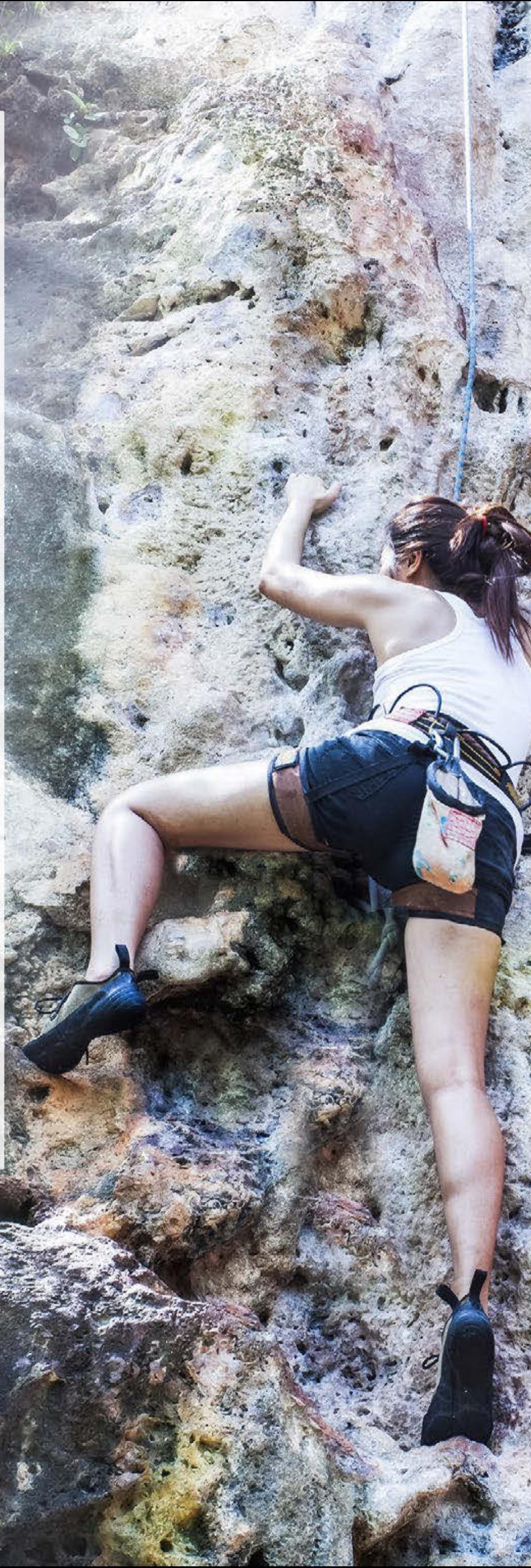
What better excuse to relax with a good book than on doctor's orders? The Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme (booksonprescription.org.uk) uses bibliotherapy to treat depression and anxiety, without the common side effects of medication. It has put together a top 20 list of mood-boosting good reads, which include *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee, and *I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith. View the full Mood-Boosting Books list at readingagency.org.uk.

AIM HIGH

Whether you are clinging to a crag in the Lake District or mounting the summit of one of the growing number of indoor walls, take up climbing and you really could feel on top of the world. "This activity requires both physical strength and mental agility. The sheer concentration and effort it demands means that it forces us to let go of the everyday stresses of life," explains Dr Nerina Ramlakhan. "Being at a height and in control can also produce a positive cocktail of stress hormones, which, unlike those released when we feel threatened or in danger, are very uplifting."

ADD A LITTLE SPICE

Spice up serotonin-boosting ancient grains such as quinoa, spelt, teff, millet and amaranth with a pinch of turmeric for a real bowl of soul food. Scientists in India have found that curcumin, the primary active ingredient of turmeric, has anti-depressant qualities that were found to be at least as effective as certain medications in the treatment of depression – but without the negative side effects. 



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PUT THE KETTLE ON

Two or three cups of black tea a day may help keep osteoporosis at bay, new research shows. This could be due to chemicals in tea making bones stronger, as well as the calcium and mineral content. Other studies have linked the high antioxidant level with a lower risk of heart attack in those having three to four cups, while some experts believe tea may help protect against cancer.



TREAT YOURSELF

On the dramatic North Berwick coastline, the Macdonald Marine Hotel & Spa's signature Top to Toe Ocean Radiance treatment (£75-£80; 90 mins) includes a powerful back massage using aromatherapy oils to work away any aches or tensions, while an anti-ageing facial will moisturise winter complexions. And, as the name suggests, even the feet are pampered. CL readers can enjoy a 15% discount on treatments and spa days (macdonaldhotels.co.uk/our-hotels/marine)*.

health notes



BEST BUY

Hydrate even the most sensitive of windswept skin with Melvita Universal Cream for face, body and hands (£15, melvita.co.uk). It's made with meadowsweet to help strengthen natural barriers and beeswax to lock in moisture for up to 24 hours.

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NATURE'S MEDICINE CABINET

Mustard leaves

There are few things growing in the vegetable patch at this time of year, but greens such as mizuna and purple leaf mustard provide a peppery freshness to seasonal dishes, as well as a boost to health. These winter salads combine antioxidants with detoxification and anti-inflammatory properties, which studies have linked to helping prevent certain cancers, including bladder, lung and breast cancer. The pungent leaves are also thought to help lower cholesterol. Cooking can destroy the fragile phytonutrients, however, so enjoy them fresh to add a little bite to a salad, or sprout the seeds on a windowsill and sprinkle over soup**.



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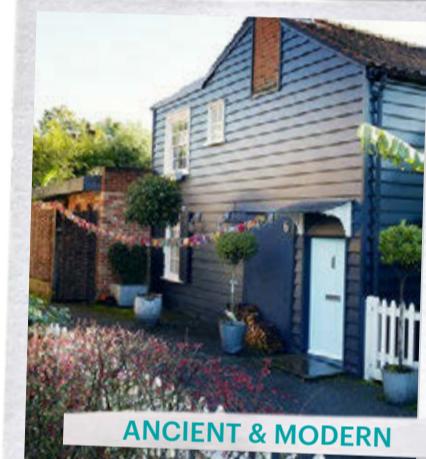
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This graceful piece features a hand-painted finish and wave-effect carving.

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CAMILLE CHEST OF DRAWERS

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SARAH RAVEN DALLOWAY VASE (450108)

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Price includes:

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WALKING IN THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS

Based at a welcoming family-run hotel on Lipari, this new tour is the ideal way to explore Italy's Aeolian islands. It offers a great combination of walking and more leisurely sightseeing.

Eight days from £1,269 per person. Departure dates 13 May and 23 September 2015.

Price includes:

- Return flights from London Gatwick to Catania
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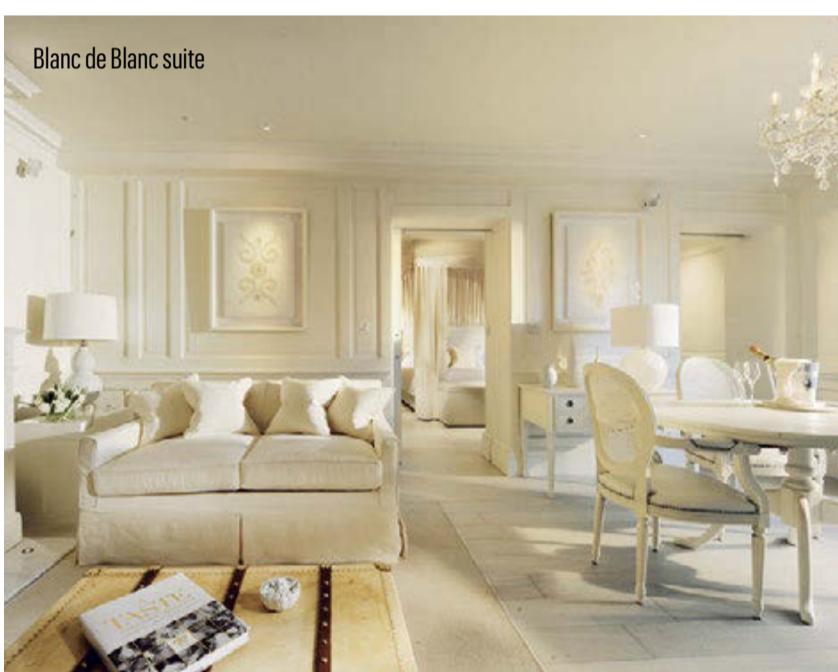
The Aeolian coastline



TO BOOK

For more information, visit traveledit.co.uk/countryliving and search TECLF1 for Crete and TECLF2 for the Aeolian Islands or call 020 7553 6955, quoting AIRFEBCLV.

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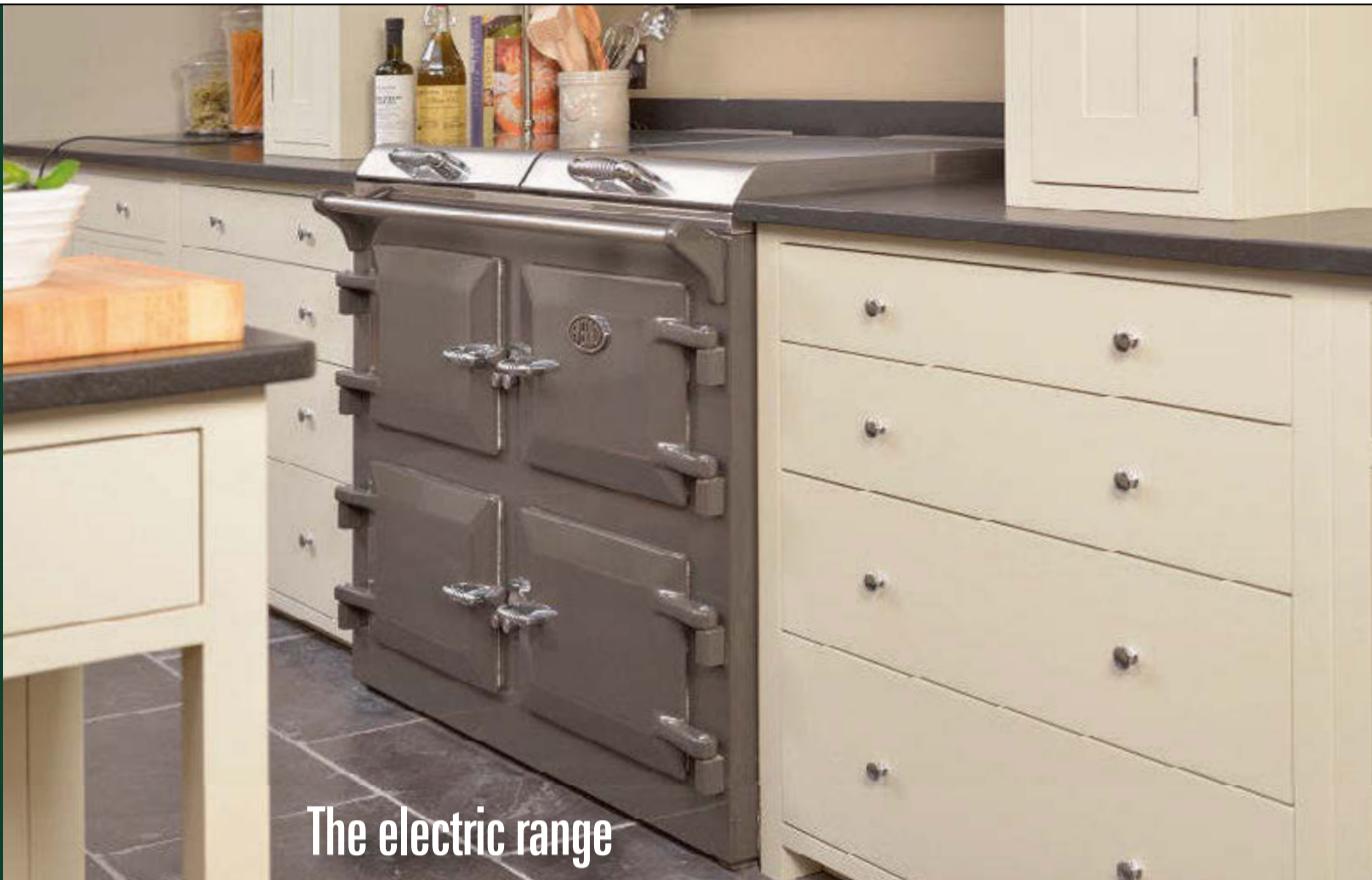
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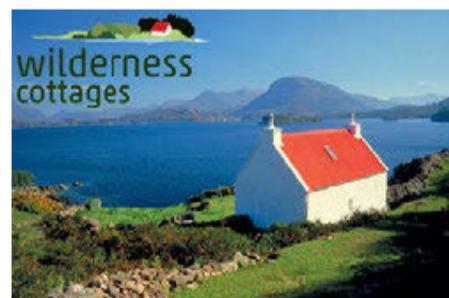


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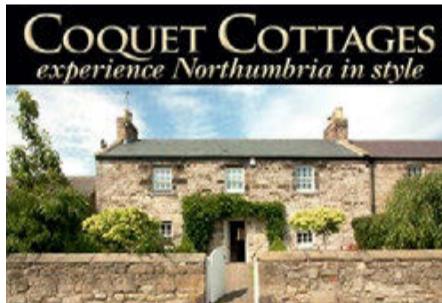
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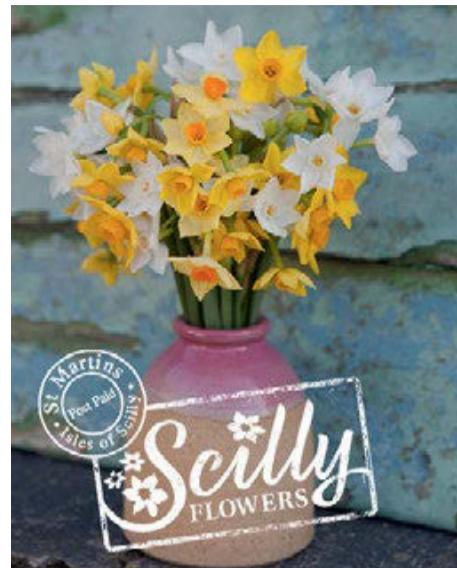
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- Divine home help?
- Masculine accessories.
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Send your answers on a postcard to: CPCNLP14803, Hearst Magazines UK, The Data Solutions Centre, Worksop S80 2RT.

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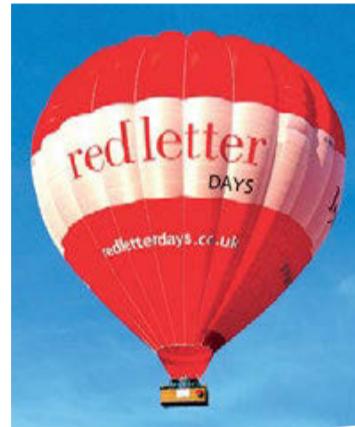
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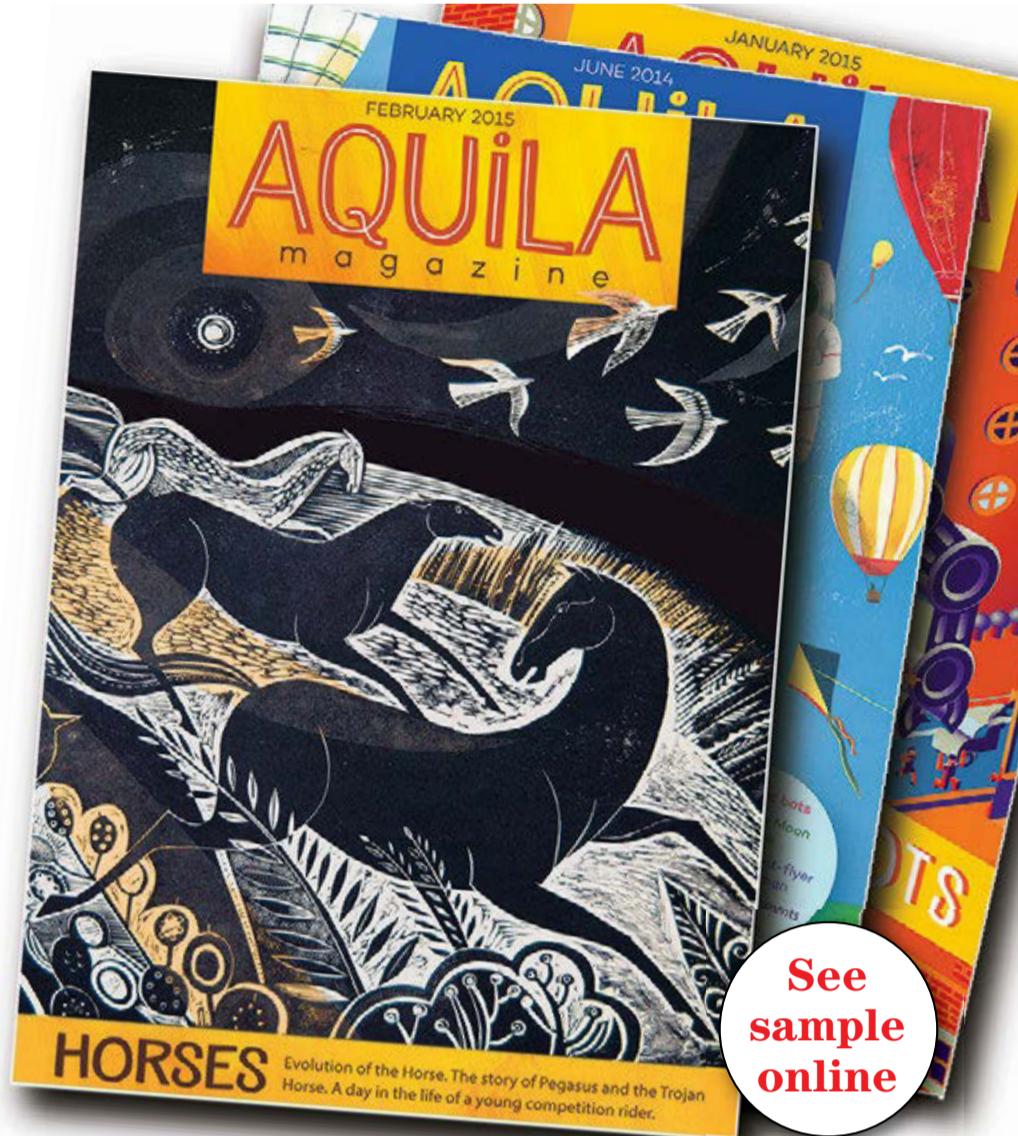
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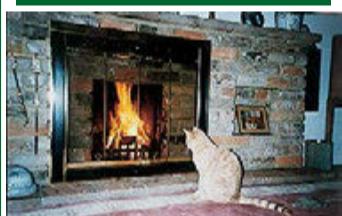
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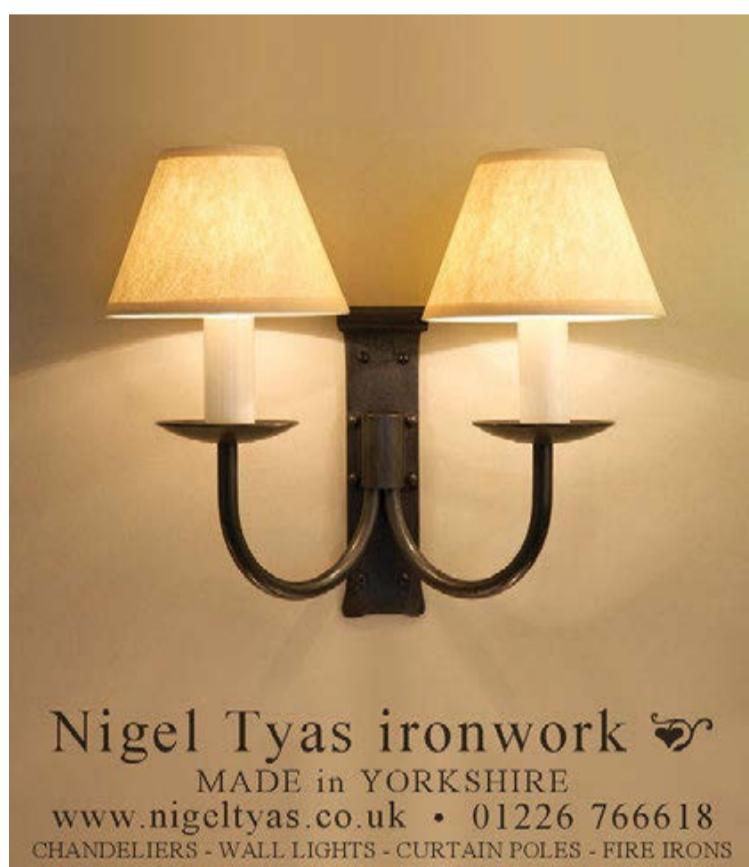
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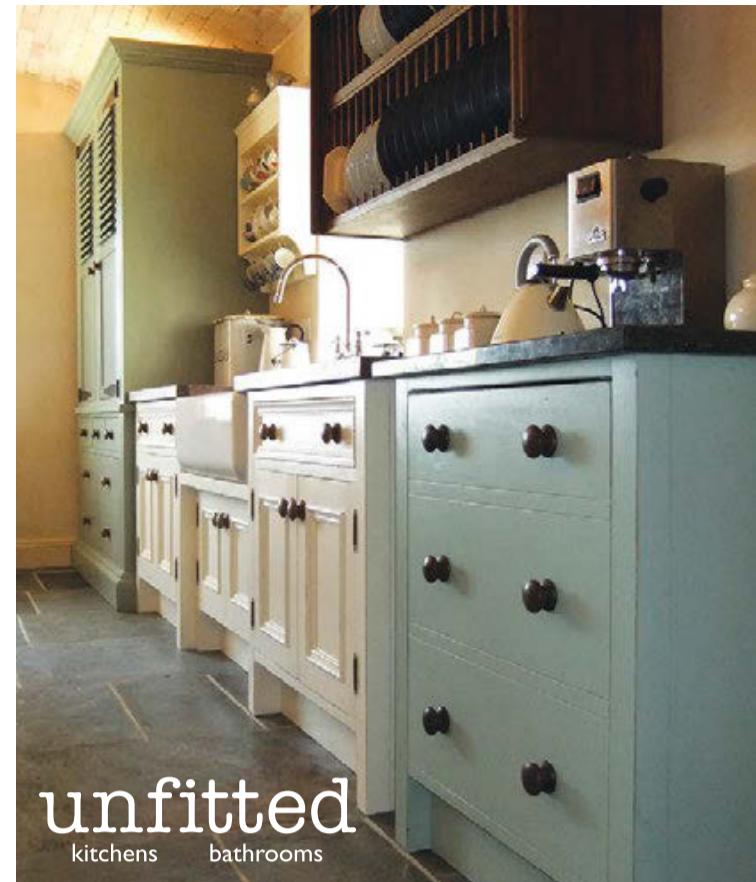
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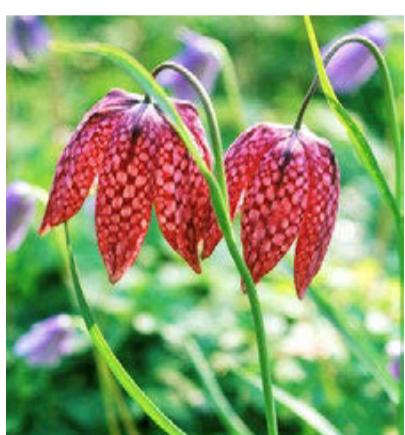
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MY COUNTRYSIDE ALAN TITCHMARSH

Reminiscing about his childhood, the broadcaster feels passionate about protecting rural Britain

I split my time between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, which is a wonderful place for a winter stroll. The place isn't filled with tourists and you get a chance to really enjoy the scenery. If you stand on the edge of Tennyson Down on the western point of the island on a clear day, you can look down and see water on both sides.

In the garden, February is great for catching up. I do a lot of rose pruning now. It's one of the only months when you're moving faster than nature and that's rare in the garden. There is also the opportunity to do some planting. When it comes to trees, you're much better off getting smaller, bare-roots specimens. They'll establish well and cost you much less than larger kinds.

I remember, as a child, enjoying that wonderful thing of breaking ice on the water. There are two tarns on Ilkley Moor in West Yorkshire where I grew up and people used to skate on the lower one. I was never proficient at it myself but

I loved to sit and watch people – the furthest I ever got was sliding around on my feet. My dad was a fireman, so very occasionally he'd go up there and help flood the tarn so there was good clean ice for skaters.

The River Wharf, where I grew up, had willows growing alongside it. I used to make fishing rods from willow wands and sit under the trees and watch the water – performing as the narrator in *The Wind in the Willows* this Christmas stirred many memories.

I'm a great fan of some of our older flowers. Many of them are at risk of being ditched because they're not dwarf and don't flower from January to December. They could have a lovely scent, or a specific disease resistance,

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Alan savours simple pleasures in life such as enjoying scenery at Tennyson Down on the Isle of Wight, and appreciating the delicate beauty of fritillaries

so by getting rid of them we're in danger of losing valuable genetic resources if nothing else. Snake's-head fritillaries are a favourite of mine, which is why I plant a thousand of them in the meadow at the back of my house every year. Little nodding dusky purple bells that have a chequered pattern, they flower in April and are delightful.

Winters in Hampshire tend to be much warmer than the ones of my childhood, when I remember scratching frost from inside the windows. They are much greener, too, as you can get things like penstemon, which we never thought was hardy at all, flowering much later. I'm not a climate-change denier but I do think that we need to be realistic and cope with the effects. Governments bleat on but unless legislation is passed to take action, it's all just talk. You come into London and see tower block windows aglow – why not fine people if they leave a light on?

We should also be very careful about building. People need homes – I'm not denying that at all – but we must think about infrastructure. It seems to me that there are far too many fields full of houses with little thought as to where the people are going to be educated, where they can shop and whether there are any medical facilities close by. Coupled with that is the fact that we need to make sure our land is peppered with decent-sized areas of butterfly and wild-flower meadows. I'm inclined to feel that in the countryside, where there are fewer votes, our needs seem to be slightly less important and it's hard not to feel a little jaundiced by that. But the countryside belongs to all of us, not just those who live there, and we all need to cherish it so we can enjoy everything it has to offer.

I used to make fishing rods from willow wands by the river and watch the water

Best British Back Gardens, presented by Alan, starts on 6 January on ITV1.

INTERVIEW BY ANNA JURY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; GETTY; REX